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THE SACRIFICE IN THE RGVEDA

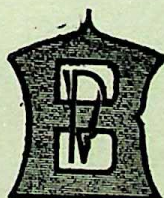
(DOCTRINAL ASPECTS)

H. AGUILAR

WITH A PREFACE

By

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Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan

DELHI

VARANASI

(INDIA)

Published by :

BHARATIYA VIDYA PRAKASHAN

1. 1. U.B. Jawaharnagar, Bungalow Road, Delhi-7
2. P. Box 108, Kachauri Gali, Varanasi-1

4820

January, 1976



Price : Rs. 50.00



Printed at :

AMAR PRINTING PRESS (SHAM PRINTING AGENCY),
8/25 VIJAY NAGAR (DOUBLE STOREY), DELHI-110009.

PREFACE

A preface is neither a review, nor a propaganda or criticism of the book. It is an 'introduction': a 'guiding into the depths' of the work, a 'prologue': a 'word which goes before' in order that what follows be better understood and situated; a 'preface': a 'saying that precedes' the proper speech and, as it were, acts as a messenger, which does not read out the message, but hands it over to the receiver—to you reader—to decipher, enjoy, read and be transformed by it...

The book that I am presenting to you, closed and for you to unpack, has a very special value, which is seldom found in works of this kind. It is certainly a piece of scholarship, which helps us to understand one of the most productive moments of the human spirit at the very core of the Indo-European civilizations. But it is, at the same time, the presentation of an existential challenge to us. The author, who has dedicated long years to this work, is not interested in indological archaeology. He aims at a "revitalization of the liturgical spirituality" for our time. His book is a call to worship, not as proceeding from a temple, a minaret or a pulpit, but from that altar which is the navel of the world and at the very center of every one of us. I should not be misunderstood—so little are we accustomed at this sort of living research within the field of specialised studies! It is neither vedic propaganda nor religious indoctrination. It is not an invitation to join a particular sect or a moral injunction to shape our lives more meaningfully—all respectable and important enterprises as they may be. It is something deeper and more subtle.

H. Aguilar begins his book by remarking that vedic religiousness grew out of its soil without the rupture which characterizes so many other religions. And he would like us to

realize—I assume—that we may also integrate, without rupture, the liturgical depth of the Vedas with our particular forms of engagement in the collaboration to the order of the world—for this is liturgy. I do not think that I betray the mind of the friend if I say that he is finding for us an important missing link between old and new spiritualities. To have failed to discover this link, or to have overlooked its importance, is at least partly responsible for the weakening of religious traditions and their degradation into ideologies and orthodoxies. When religions become storehouses of doctrines instead of centers of life, they begin to degenerate.

It is the character of orthopraxis which mainly enlivens a religious tradition and prevents it from becoming a museum piece needing then its curators and zealous defenders. In other words, the core of any human tradition is its liturgical character. This gives us the clue not only to understand a tradition properly, but also to discover its links with other periods of human history so that having found common roots we establish a deeper communion with other human experiences. Cultural continuity goes far beyond the realm of the specific doctrines, and the life of a tradition is not limited to its conceptual framework.

One of the most important tasks of our times, in my opinion, consists in discovering the sacredness of the secular. The Vedas are here a point in case and Aguilar's book a beautiful example of it. Let me explain. Secular consciousness, i.e. the conviction of the ultimate and irreducible character of the temporal reality, has generally been interpreted in contrast with and opposition to sacred consciousness. I submit that the main reason is, on the one hand, the supposed identification of the secular with the profane and, on the other, the dialectical interpretation of the polarity sacred-profane, so that what is not sacred is considered profane and vice versa. But neither of these two assumptions is necessary. The secular mentality, although it grew from the sphere of the profane, does not need to be identified with it and, further, it does not need to be incompatible with the sphere of the sacred. In the secular mentality there is as much place for the mysterious, the non-manipulable, the non-rational, as in any sacred world-

view. The temporal strivings of Men can be as holy and sacred as the intemporal actions of the Gods. The *saeculum*, i.e. the temporal structure of the world, precisely because it is considered ultimate and irreducible, can be as sacred as any other ultimate reality. But this is enough for a Preface.

Using now a secular language in order to express the intuition of the vedic liturgy, I may venture the following statements :

Neither the world of Man, nor that of the superior forces at work in the universe, which we may call the divine, let alone this cosmos, are finished products, static entities. All is in flux, be it progress, ontological growth, constitutive expansion, internal dynamism or life. Now, Man insofar as he is Man and neither world, nor God, has a peculiar task to perform, a very specific web to weave in the entire loom of the real—to follow the vedic metaphor. Man has the power to consciously collaborate in the sustenance of the universe. This power, however, is neither absolute nor can he exercise it alone. He needs collaboration both from the forces of nature and from the divine powers. Furthermore, he needs the common efforts of his fellow-human beings as well. Any real human action is always communitarian, otherwise it is not an authentic human act. This proper human action does not consist in looking after the individual's or the clan's own subsistence, as it seems to be the main concern of the animal world, but in caring for the welfare of the entire universe. This Man cannot do it with his hands, nor with his mind alone; he needs to join his activity with that of the whole universe. This action which binds the three worlds together, which is performed by Man in collaboration with and obedience to the Gods and the World is called sacrifice. It is that cosmotheandric act by which each sphere of being, to speak in this way, collaborates to the sustenance of the whole, the *sarvam*, and this is salvation, as the etymological connection of these two words already suggests.

This is not exactly the language of the Vedas and Aguilar does not use this language either. Yet, his book helps us to understand that the Vedas, specially the R̥g Veda, speak also to our times. This book makes the discourse of the

ishis accessible to us and dispels on the way more than one misunderstanding. It was a certain 'civilised' complex of superiority which led so many outstanding scholars to interpret the vedic lore in terms of magic, naturalistic views and animistic thinking. Aguilar calls these views to task and overcomes those prejudices.

It is not for me now to sum up the very many insights of this book or to recount the thorough study that the author has made of the R̥g Veda in an existentially engaged way. One senses that at stake is his own personal quest and the regaining of his own identity by means of the vedic revelation. I may perhaps recall a couple of contributions which the reader may want to remark with special interest.

A first and most important Idea is the emphasis laid upon the central place of the sacrifice and the analysis of its true nature. The sacrifice is not a mere 'do ut des' primitive device in order to appease the mighty and terrible powers of nature. "The primitives do not divinize the elements, but they look at them as symbols of transcendent realities" says our author in his convincing criticism of the interpretation of the vedic Gods as 'divinizations' of the natural phenomena. The sacrifice is not, either, a more or less magic procedure by which men try to get what otherwise they could not reach. It is also not, thirdly, an exaggerated exaltation of one particular religious act which, from being a means to praise and worship the divinity, becomes an end in itself and gives birth to a complicated ritualism beyond the grasp of any ordinary man so as then to justify the priestcraft and ritualistic inflation of later times. On the contrary, the sacrifice is the expression of "the creative and redemptive dimension of the liturgy" and it has been the vedic contribution to have elevated the sacrifice to the "character of first principle." Twice in his book Aguilar uses the epithet of 'people of the sacrifice' for the vedic Indians, as Israel could be called "the people of Yahwe" and, we could add, Islam 'the people of the Book.'

The vedic intuition, I would say with my own words, is that the ultimate 'stuff' or 'structure' of the universe, or of reality is precisely sacrifice. It is not 'God' or 'Being', but

Action and more concretely the sacrificial act. The real is dynamic and its ultimate dynamism is the sacrifice, i.e. that urge, movement, spirit, energy, which encompasses God and all the creatures, and which consists precisely in letting the real be and in maintaining the balance and keeping the tension between all the very poles which constitute the real.

A main challenge of this book is the intriguing thought that a vedic liturgy could and should be revived today not in a slavish copy of the ancient rites, but in a creative continuation of the same urge and obligation, although it leaves it to the reader to undertake the necessary steps for such a daring enterprise. A further not minor feature of Aguilar's study is its contribution to a more satisfactory hermeneutics of vedic wisdom. I may be allowed some paragraphs on this subject.

All could be reduced to a question of proper translation, i.e. of providing a system of symbols capable of making the texts intelligible in armonic continuation with the traditional understanding of them. A couple of examples will permit me to be brief, leaving for another occasion a fuller development of the problem, because I may be embarking the reader on my own boat—which is not the proper function of a Preface.

We translate, say, *ṛta* as truth, order, sacrifice, ritual. Every scholar has a point and is generally not wrong in what he/she affirms. The difficulty is not so much with the Sanskrit or classical word, as with our contemporary understanding of the equivalent vernacular. Truth, for instance, does not need to be understood, even in English, as a mere logical coherence between a subject and a predicate, or as correspondence between a statement and its meaning or as the 'reality' behind, and so on. The English word 'truth' has still strong echoes of a power, a reality by itself, a something to which one is 'faithful' 'trustworthy' and thus liberates, makes happy, produces authenticity, etc. The word 'truth' may still be connected with action and involvement, with faith and with sacrifice : but we may have forgotten it. One of the great teachings of the Vedic Wisdom is precisely this still holistic approach to reality.

Something very similar could be said of the so-called naturalistic interpretation. The error does not lie only or

even so much in the 'interpretation' of the data (a provisional expression, for there are no data without interpretation), but in the interpreting category, i.e. in the underlying notion of 'nature' itself, as if nature were a lifeless piece of mere inert matter following some sophisticated 'physical' laws unknown to the more 'primitive' peoples, but which we know by now, having 'demythologised' them. In other words, the error may not lie at the other end of the rope, but at this one : at assuming that the word we use has a precise and definite meaning. Whatever the vedic Gods may be in the conception of the vedic poets, they were not what the defenders of the naturalistic interpretation would like us to believe, namely a superimposition of human fears, desires and expectations into the sober Newtonian or Galilean or Einsteinian 'nature'.

I am not saying that the vedic books, or any other traditional sacred Scripture, have to make necessarily sense and that their message has to be true, or acceptable to everybody and to us in particular, I am defending that the question of hermeneutics is more than just putting a series of unknown 'variables' into well known parametres. A real interpretation is not a mechanical work of shifting from one unknown field to a well known one. Translation, as an art of conveying intelligibility, is a creative act which concerns the two poles of the equation. It changes both, it provides a new meaning. It enriches both : the 'original', by eliciting from it unsuspected possibilities and awakening undreamt potentialities and the 'translation' itself, by enlarging and deepening the very field of intelligibility of the supposedly known language. The translation conveys something new, it inserts the 'original' into a new context without despoiling it from its originality. A real translation is never a 'dèjà vu'—and yet uses words familiar to us. This is precisely the extraordinary power of the word as symbol that mere signs do not possess. Aguilar has succeeded in translating for us one of the most central aspects of human existence and of vedic wisdom : the liturgical dimension of reality. "In spite of appearances—he writes—the real chronicle of our species is not that of the progress of man as *tool-maker*, as *homo faber*, but the history of the blazing visions of seers and prophets, who have inspired the life of millions of human

beings.”

* * * * *

We are assisting in our times to a renewed interest in vedic studies. The philological phase is always valid and without it we could have done nothing. The several philosophical and historical approaches are also invaluable and there would be no point in minimizing them. But there is a thirst for integrative studies, which relate the wisdom of the past to the queries of the present and discover, in the seeds of the elders, prophetic signs for the future. The book of my friend could be a step in this direction if the reader accompanies him in this pilgrimage we cannot undertake alone.

R. PANIKKAR

Varanasi
December, 1975

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the Vedic religion is the fact of being one of the few great religions which does not represent a rupture with the previous tradition, the tradition from which it originates. In this sense it discernibly differs from Buddhism¹, Christianity², and Islam³, for example, not to speak of the Iranian religion,

1. One of the passages which throw better into relief the antithetical aspect of Buddhism in regard to Hinduism is undoubtedly *Milinda Pañha* I, 23, where Nagasena, after having completed his brahmanical formation, exclaims in bitterness of soul : *Empty forsooth are these Vedas, and as chaff. There is in them netther reality, nor worth, nor essential truth. !*
2. One is struck by the accents of an opposition to the Jewish Law which appears in the Christianity taught by St. Paul : it is the Law that produces wrath ; where there is no Law there is not transgression (*Romans* IV, 15 ; *Calossians* II. 22) ; it is from the *curse of the Law* that Christ has redeemed us (*Galatians* III, 13) ; the commandments of the Law are even discribed as *a ministration of death written and engraven in stones* in opposition to the New Law, *a ministration of the Spirit* (*II Corintians* III. 7). The accents of an opposition to the Law in St. Paul are not less decided than the anti-biblicism that animated many sectaries during the first Christian centuries.
3. As far as Islam is concerned it is, to begin with, a very clear reaction against the prevalent religion in Arabia at the time of the Prophet, to wit, the religion of the "mushrikūn", the heathen arabs who, according to the Qur'ān, *assign associates to Allah* and who, at least in that sense, represent the basis and the point of departure of the very reform of the Prophet. As it is known Muhammad determined not to tolerate and to destroy them with their cults after taking Mecca. The reactionary aspect of Islam did not however end here but it was extended to Jews and Christians after the liberation of Arabia from paganism, even though the Prophet had respected their rights.

which in spite of coming out of the same source as the Vedic one represents a radical and almost virulent reaction against it.

In this regard the Vedic religion comes very close to the religion of Abraham, which both Jews and Muslims consider as the point of departure of their respective faiths. As a matter of fact the Muslim tradition does not hesitate to present Islam as a restoration of the religion of Abraham. One of Muhammad's predecessors, Zaid ben 'Amr, is described as travelling through Arabia with the idea of discovering the religion of the great patriarch, from whom according to the *Genesis* the tribes of the North of the country descend. The Qur'an goes so far as to consider synonymous the terms "Muslim" and "Hanif", which designates in that book the religion of Abraham, and, when the Prophet makes Mecca the center of pilgrimage, he ascribes the building of the Ka'bah to Abraham and Ismael and brings the prayer-ceremonial in connection with the Father of the Believers⁴.

The remarkable thing about the religion of Abraham is that in spite of representing an unquestionable innovation, it does not appear anywhere as a rupture with the Mesopotamian tradition from which it originates. The God of Abraham is not an unknown or strange God, he is the God of his fathers, even if he never addresses himself to the patriarch with this specific title. He is also the God of his kindred. As a matter of fact, when his nephew Laban parts at last from Jacob, his son-in-law, who like Isaac his father has sought his wife from among his Mesopotamian relations, he addresses him with these significant words: *The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us (Genesis XXXI. 55)*. That amounts to saying that the God of Abraham does not differ from the God of his nephew Laban, of his brother Nahor and of his father Terah. Not only the religion of Abraham does not appear anywhere as a rupture with the religion of his ancestors, but it does not even appear as particularly opposed to the religions of the neighbouring regions. In fact, on a certain occasion Abraham does not only accept the blessings of a "pagan" priest, Melchizedek, but he designates his own

4. cf. E R E, art. *Muhammad* p. 875.

God with the same terms as employed by the King of Salem, in the previous passage, namely, as *the Lord God most High* ('El 'Elyon) *maker of Heaven and Earth* (*Genesis XIV. 18-23*). At this point however the parallelism between the religion of Abraham and the Vedic religion breaks completely, since the latter unlike the religion of the Patriarchs, takes a clearly hostile attitude regarding the circumambient religious atmosphere. In that sense one can say without hesitation that the Vedic religion is born out of a clash between the Aryan tradition and the circumambient religious ideologies⁵. But this does not annul what has been said before, namely, that there is no solution of continuity between Vedic and pre-Vedic traditions.

In stating that the Vedic religion has not been born as a reaction we do not want to imply that it is simply the continuation of the previous tradition. We rather think that it represents a greater transformation of it than even the reform of Zarathushtra was. What we mean to say is that no rupture is apparent in the transition from the one to the other. On this point there can scarcely be any doubt since historically speaking there is nothing to prove any such rupture. More difficult to substantiate is the other point, i.e., that there is in the Vedas a positive transformation of the pre-Vedic system, since we know very little, almost nothing, about the common Indo-Iranian or pre-Vedic tradition and in this situation it is undoubtedly risky to pronounce any judgment about it. However, this does not preclude intelligent speculation.

The way in which the Vedic religion deals with certain theological categories of the Indo-European period, like sacrifice, truth, the gods, is in certain respects so singular, so unique, that we would be justified in postulating a reinterpretation of them and together with them of the entire religious system, since they constituted some of its fundamental categories. If this were not the case, we should expect to find something more than just external parallels at least in the Iranian tradition which is admittedly the closest. But

5. cf. Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony*, p. 12.

clearly nothing of the sort is apparent, despite what has been often said.

Let us put aside for the moment the question of the sacrifice and the gods—we will return to this later—and concentrate our attention on the Vedic conception of *ṛta* or the Truth, which is in itself a sufficiently illustrative example. This is certainly a concept from the pre-Vedic times as is proved by the fact of being equally represented in the Iranian religion and yet the Vedic interpretation of it has no strict parallel in the Avesta. This is a point that Lüders throws very well into relief in his monograph on Varuṇa when he says :

“The Indian *ṛta* corresponds exactly to the Avestan *asha* as far as the name is concerned....”⁶

“And yet there is a difference. *Ṛta* is absolutely primordial and is placed above all the gods, whereas *asha* is created by Ahura Masdāh :

Y. 31.7 “*hwō hrathwā dam’ish ashām...*”: *Who has created the Truth through his wisdom...*,

Y. 31.8 “*hyat thwā hām cashmainī hāngraban haithim ashahyā damim:*”: *When I beheld you with my eyes as the true creator of the Truth.*”⁷

The difference of the significance of *ṛta-asha* in Iran and in India goes in all probability back to the time before the reform of Zarathushtra. Even admitting with Lüders that the personification of *asha* in the Avesta as one of the Amesha Spentas or Immortal Spirits created by Ahura Mandāh is a peculiar arrangement of Zarathushtra’s⁸, there is no serious reason to affirm that before the Zoroastrian reform *asha* was occupying in Iran the same position that *ṛta* was holding in India. Personally I believe that *asha* had never been in Iran anything other than a mere counterpart of “*druj*” (=Vedic “*druh*”) the *untruth*, certainly all important as such, but not in an absolute sense. To me Zarathushtra’s formulation of the two

6. H. Lüders, *Varuṇa*. p. 652.

7. H. Lüders, *op. cit.*, p. 653.

8. “Das ist eine von Zarathushtra geschaffene neue Auffassung”. Cf. H. Lüders, *op. cit.*, p. 653.

Spirits, the Spirit of Truth and Spirit of Untruth, implicitly conceived as twin sons of Ahura Mazdāh, thus equated to a sort of Absolute, standing beyond the pairs of opposites, far from being unfaithful to the Iranian tradition, represents rather a new plastic way of expressing it.

Leaving aside conjectures, the fact is that the Vedic conception of *ṛta* is unparalleled in the rest of the Indo-European traditions, the Iranian included, and this among other things, favours our assumption that the Vedic religion is in all probability a re-interpretation of the religion inherited from the Indo-Iranian ancestors. Renou is basically of the same opinion. Says he :

"The Vedic religion is an Indian creation. If some material was borrowed, all its elements were brought together in a new system, which bears the powerful impress of the Brahmanic spirit."

"The mythology of the *Ṛg Veda* is...not directly ancestral but collateral. Everything is subordinated to a consciously elaborated system of clasificatory symbolism...Such work necessarily required long elaboration."⁹

About the proceedings or conditions that enabled the Vedic seers to graft new conceptions on the old ones, or, to integrate the ancient tradition in the new interpretation, we are not in a position to say anything concrete. Still one can imagine that certain typical characteristics of the Vedic language might have favoured it or contributed to it in a considerable manner. We are thinking specially of two, namely :

(a) The maintenance of the old meanings of words, which far from being rejected are often intermingled with the more recent ones.¹⁰

9. L. Renou, *Vedic India*, pp 57, & 9-10.

10. A remarkable example of this is found in the verse 4, 40, 5, the commentary of which would demand a complete exposition of the theology of Agni in the Vedas :

The swan that sits in the bright (heaven), the hotṛ who sits on the altar, the guest who sits in the house, who sits within men, who sits in the best place (the heart), who sits in (the bosom of) ṛta, who sits in heaven, born of the

(b) The deliberate ambiguity of many formulae, which enables, logically, a multiplicity of interpretations.¹¹

Without these two devices it is difficult to conceive how the Vedic hermeneutics could have ever succeeded in re-interpreting the former tradition without rejecting it at the same time. As a matter of fact all hermeneutics having a similar aim—we are thinking of most of the esoteric systems—have ample recourse to both methods. Among the Sufis, for example, it is common to speak of various levels of transmission of the Qur'ān and of the different senses in which the book can be understood. Apart from this their hermeneutics are characterized by the use of an obscure and ambiguous language, which can be interpreted in many different ways. This among other things enables them to defend themselves against the charge of heresy often raised against them. Thus, for example, Ibn El-Arabi summoned before a Muslim inquisition at Aleppo to defend himself against charges of nonconformity, pleaded that his poems were metaphorical, the basic meaning being that God perfects man through divine love. Thanks to all this it is possible for the Sufis to speak of the Qur'ān as the encoded document which contains the Sufi teachings and to re-interpret Islam without rejecting it.

When we bear in mind the voluntary ambiguity of the formulae as well as the deliberate maintenance of the pre-Vedic meanings of the words on the part of the ṛṣis, we realize with what precaution one should proceed before trying to wield the so-called “argumentum ex silentio” in the case of the Veda, since one starts to suspect that silence itself might

waters, born of the cow, born of ṛta, born of the mountain, the very ṛta
(hamsaḥ suciṣad vasur antariḥśasaddhotā vedaṣad atithir duroṇasat/
nṛṣad varasad ṛtasad vyomasad abjā gojā ṛtajā adriajā ṛtam).

11. This is a point on which there is general agreement. Thus, Bergaigne, for instance, says :

“J'admets parfaitement que l'indetermination de la formule ait correspondu souvent a l'indetermination de la pensee chez celui qui l'employait, ou même qui faisait oeuvre d'auteur en la modifiant...
(Le bon sens) m'interdit de croire que des formules susceptibles de plusieurs applications aient toujours eu dans chacun de leurs emplois un sens unique et precise.” See A. Bergaigne, *La Religion Vedique*, vol. 1, p. 216.

have been a further device used by the Vedic poets in order to safeguard the doctrinal ambiguity of their language. Whatever the reason for their attitude might have been the fact is that it gives an opportunity for free individual interpretation, and this is really remarkable in such a remote period. Almost everywhere when a new sense replaces the old one, as it happens often in the case of Buddhism or Christianity, for example,¹² such a choice is impossible and what is rather imperative is a new vision of things which will logically tend to crystalize in a new profession of faith. Nothing of the sort happens in the case of the Veda. Even where a new sense replaces in general an older meaning, it is easy to see that far from rejecting it, it rather incorporates it and penetrates it fully, as we shall see when later we discuss the Vedic gods.

Already from the Vedic period the way in which the ṛṣis preserve the tradition without ceasing to re-interpret it enables the kind of religious pluralism, which has become typical of later Hinduism and which in some people's opinion constitutes one of its grandeurs. What has been said of Hinduism in general—that rather than being a religion it is a sea of religions—could also be applicable to the earlier period to a considerable extent.

After these remarks on the first developments of the Vedic tradition, which we have presented as something at the same time traditional and radically new, let us speak now of its historical continuation.

It is usual to think of the Vedic religion as something of the past¹³, something that survives only as a determining factor of later Hinduism¹⁴, but otherwise very much ignored¹⁵,

12. Think only of the term "atta" in Buddhism or the expression *Son of God* in Christianity.

13. See *ERE*, art *Vedic Religion*, p. 801.

14. See *ERE*, *ibid*.

15. "...notwithstanding the fact that the study of the Veda was made an absolute duty for all men belonging to the three higher classes of society, an adequate understanding of that body of literature was lost at an early date...There is every reason for the contention that India had a very inadequate and incomplete knowledge of the Veda before it was discovered by European scholarship. J. Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Philosophy*, p. 9.

despite the constant inclination to refer to it as the only source of the "dharma"¹⁶.

It looks sometimes as if one should study the Vedic religion in the way one studies the Egyptian or the Mesopotamian religions and yet, in spite of their common antiquity, the approach cannot be the same, since, whereas the religions of Egypt or Mesopotamia disappeared with their cultures thousands of years ago, the Vedic religion, however decreased or worn away it may look, has survived the scourge of time thanks to the maintenance of its liturgy in the brahmanical circles. The fact that the Vedic sacrifices have continued to be celebrated not only centuries after the Vedic period, but even up to the present day is an unquestionable proof of the persistence of the old religion, bearing in mind that the "yajña" constitutes its more important element.¹⁷

Just as Buddhaghosa could say in a different context, that as long as the "vinaya" will exist the "dhamma" also will exist, in the same way one could affirm that as long as the Vedic sacrifices will last, so long the Vedic religion will also last.

It is as something living and capable of having meaning in the present that we propose to study the Vedic liturgy here and not as a monument from the past, without any relevance in the present, except may be in the sense of helping us to discover the ever living value of the mythical language. On this point it is worthwhile quoting here some words of Mircea Eliade for those who have not given much thought to it :—

16. J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

17. "It would...be incorrect to suppress the fact that Vedic sacrifices survived, specially in brahmanical circles, for many centuries after the Vedic period and in particular cases to the present day and to deny that part of the Vedic rites, specially the so-called "samskaras", though adapted and transformed, are preserved and still celebrated. That means that an important element of the Vedic culture continued to exist, even though in course of time the circles where it was generally adopted were declining both in number and influence and the increasing difference between that trait of religious culture and the Hindu environment make a right understanding and evaluation of the form even more difficult". Cf. J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

"Today we are on the way to an understanding of one thing of which the XIX century had not even a presentiment, that the symbol, the myth and the image are of the very substance of the spiritual life, that they may become disguised, mutilated or degraded, but are never extirpated..."

"Images, symbols and myths are not irresponsible creations of the psyche ; they respond to a need and fulfill a function, that of bringing to light the most hidden modalities of being. Consequently the study of them enables us to reach a better understanding of man, of man *as he is*, before he has come to terms with the conditions of history. Every historical man carries within himself a great deal of prehistoric humanity..."

"This non-historical part of the human being wears like a medal, the imprinted memory of a richer, a more complete and almost beatific existence. When a historically conditioned being—for instance, an occidental of our own day—allows himself to be invaded by the non-historical part of himself (which happens to him much oftener and more completely than he imagines), this is not necessarily a retrogression towards the deepest sources of organic life. Often he is reentering by means of the images and symbols that then come to play, a paradisiac stage of primordial humanity..."

"The *unconscious*, as it is called, is far more *poetic*, and, let us add, *more philosophic*, more mythic than the conscious. It is not always necessary to know mythology in order to live out the great mythical themes. This is well known to psychologists, who discover the most beautiful mythologies in the *waking dreams* of their patients. For the unconscious is not haunted by monsters only : the gods, the goddesses, the heroes and the fairies dwell there too ; moreover the monsters of the unconscious are themselves mythological, seeing that they continue to fulfill the same functions that they fulfilled in all mythologies—in the last analysis, that of helping man to liberate himself, to complete his initiation..."

"All that essential and indescribable part of man that is called *imagination* dwells in the realms of symbolism and still lives upon archaic myths and theologies.

It depends...upon modern man to *reawaken* the inesti-

mable treasure of images that he bears within him ; and to reawaken the images so as to contemplate them in their pristine purity and assimilate their message."¹⁸

To discover and to assimilate the message of the mythical language of the Veda is unquestionably an important task, but not the only desirable one, since that language was intended to be and still is the accompaniment of a rite and in consequence it would be incomplete to deal with the one without making reference to the other, specially in the present case, in which it can be said that the liturgy has contributed to an important degree to keep alive the Scripture among the people, who were otherwise little inclined to study it, despite the duty traditionally imposed on them.

To help to understand the meaning of this liturgy, which has miraculously been preserved, despite all the unfavourable winds that have blown against it, is one of the purposes of this book, which is much more interested in existential realities than in historico-cultural matters. The undeniable importance of liturgy to the whole of the Hindu spirituality certainly not smaller than the one that yoga, for instance, has and its momentousness as a characteristically differentiating factor in regard to other Indian spiritualities, specially Buddhism, make a justification of this book superfluous, even if the Vedic religion is far from being at present in a very prosperous state.

The complex of circumstance that have given rise to the present situation is not easy to analyse. Still, it seems that one should reckon as important factors of it the influence of the ideological currents of Vedānta on one side and Buddhism on the other. That is at least what several authors think, among them Śrī Aurobindo, who in regard to this point says the following :

“(The Vedānta) held in itself...strong tendencies which worked towards the disintegration of the old Vedic thought and culture. First, it tended to subordinate more and more completely the outward ritual, the material utility of the

18. M. Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, pp. 11 19.

mantra and the sacrifice to a more purely spiritual aim and intention. The balance, the synthesis preserved by the old mystics between the external and the internal, the material and the spiritual life was displaced and disorganized. A new balance, a new synthesis was established, leaning finally towards ascetism and renunciation, and maintained itself until it was in its turn displaced and disorganized by the exaggeration of its own tendencies in Buddhism. The sacrifice, the symbolic ritual, became more and more a useless survival and even an encumbrance; yet, as so often happens, by the very fact of becoming mechanical and ineffective the importance of everything that was most external in them came to be exaggerated and their minutiae irrationally enforced by that part of the national mind which still clung to them. A sharp practical division came into being, effective though never entirely recognized in theory between Veda and Vedānta, a distinction which might be expressed in the formula : *the Veda 'or the priests, the Vedānta for the sages.'*¹⁹

Instead of saying that the Vedānta caused the ruin of the liturgical spirituality of the Vedic period, I think we can say that it contributed to its decline in a positive way, on the one side overemphasising the importance of pure meditation, on the other side relegating to a lower plane the value of the traditional liturgy. A reason for such an attitude may be sought in the excess of ritualism attained during the period of the Brāhmaṇas and which was perhaps necessary to check, lest it should suffocate a more genuine spirituality. As Deussen puts it : "the older Upaniṣads were so deeply conscious of the hostile character of the entire ritualistic system of the Brāhmaṇas that they could concede to it only a relative recognition."²⁰

Whatever it may be the final result of this reaction, in principle quite healthy, was a progressive loss of prestige of the traditional path of sacrifice or "karma-mārga", which since then appears often as subordinate to the path of knowledge or "jñāna-mārga", favoured by the Upaniṣadic currents.

19. Sri Aurobindo, *On the Veda*, pp. 14-15.

20. P. Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads*, p. 61.

With the polarity "karma-marga/jñāna-marga", which—it has been said—is already foretold by the distinction made in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* between "deva-yajña" and "ātma-yajña"²¹, there appears a sort of trauma or internal tension in the bosom of Hinduism which was not to cease throughout the centuries and which could have brought about a schism like the one that took place in the case of Buddhism, if not for the insistence of the new current of accepting the authority of the Veda.

To help to overcome this dichotomy, pushed, rather than attenuated, by the partisan attempts of solution of both Mīmāṃsās²² is another of the purposes or aspirations of this book. In order to realize it the first condition is to make a new enquiry on the data of the problem. From that we can expect to obtain a more qualified result, at least judging by the tone of the words of Ananda Coomaraswamy, who has made a 'personal' enquiry into the subject. He says :

"The efficacy of the ritual sacrifice (karma-yajña), that the ritual undertaken with a certain end in view assuredly procures that end, is by no means denied in the Upaniṣads.

21. "...l'exaltation enthousiaste du sacrifice au brahman qui conclut cette enumeration, atteste une orientation nouvelle de la pensée, étrangère ou plutôt contraire aux Brāhmaṇas. La doctrine, d'accord avec la composition, s'achemine vers l'Upaniṣad qui clot le Śaṅkara. L'esprit des Upaniṣads s'exprime plus nettement encore dans une autre classification des sacrifices. 'On dit : qui vaut le mieux ? celui qui sacrifie au soi (ātman) ? celui qui sacrifie aux dieux ? Il faut répondre celui qui sacrifie au soi. Celui qui sacrifie au soi c'est celui qui sait ainsi : Par ceci tel membre de moi est purifié par ceci tel membre de moi est mis en place. Comme un serpent se débarrasse de sa peau morte, ainsi il se débarrasse de de corps mortel qui est le mal ; fait de ṛc, fait de yajus, fait de sāman, fait d'oblations. il prend possession du monde celeste. Et celui qui sacrifie aux dieux c'est celui qui sait ainsi : Aux dieux je sacrifie ceci, aux dieux j'offre ceci. Comme un pire qui porterait le tribut à un meilleur, ou comme un vaiśya qui porterait le tribut à son roi, tel il est, et il ne conquiert pas une place aussi grande que l'autre'. (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 11.2.6. 13-14.

See K. Bhattacharya. *Le "vedisme" de certains textes hindouistes*, Journal Asiatique, 1967, pp. 203-805.

22. Cf. S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 29.

The end in view, however, is the renewal and magnification of life, not an absolute emancipation from mortality. Knowledge alone....is the realisation of immortality, in or regardless of any here and now. So then there is a higher sacrifice, *his who understands* ('ya evam veda), the ritual not only in its imitative operation here as a thing per-formed, but in its intrinsic form as a thing un-formed, re-turned; there in the uttermost Empyrean, the lotus of the heart. And that applies not only to specific rituals, such as the horse-sacrifice or offering of soma, but also to all functions of life, which if they are undertaken blindly and desirously increase the sum of our mortality, but if undertaken undesirously and unselfishly...are by no means' obstacles, but rather ways of enlightenment. What is here involved is *transformation* (paravṛtti, abhi-sambhava)...All that is further developed in the *Bhagavad Gita*, e.g., 4.27, 32 and 33.

*Others pour out as their sacrifice all the functionings of the senses (indriya-karmāṇi) and all those of life (prāṇa-karmāṇi), in the fire of the discipline of self-restraint (ātmasaṃyogāgnau), which is lit by wisdom (jñāna-dīpile)... ; many and various are the sacrifices thus outspread before the face of God (Brahman), but all these are by way of works, which if thou understand it is thy release ; better than the sacrifice of any objects is that of wisdom, therewith are works undone in gnosis (jñāne parisamāpyate), naught remaining over.'*²³

So far as the view-point of Ananda Coomaraswamy is correct, i e., so far as it is possible to convert the rituals into ways of enlightenment—which is also implied by words of the *Gita* : *Which if thou understand it is thy release*—it is clear that the opposition between "karmamārga" and jñānamārga", as it is normally understood, is to some extent fictitious. However, as long as that distinction will be psychologically felt—and it is actually felt—it will be impossible for the majority of the Hindus to become aware of the spiritual riches hidden in the Vedic liturgy, in spite of the fact that "even at this day there are persons who bestow immense sums of money for the performance and teaching of Vedic sacrifice and "ritual"²⁴ and

23. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *A new approach to the Vedas*, pp. 35-38.

24. S. Dasgupta, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

no orthodox brahmin can dispense with his daily Vedic prayers and other obligatory ceremonies, although, if he likes, he can do without the "pūjā" or *image-worship*.²⁵

As the title of the book indicates our main point of reference will be the *Rg Veda*, which we consider, in spite of the chronological disparity of its constituent elements as an organic whole. On this point it is surprising to see the coincidence of opinion of two authors otherwise as diametrically opposed as Śrī Aurobindo and Bergaigne.

The first says :

"We have at any rate the same notions repeated from hymn to hymn with the same constant terms and figures and frequently in the same phrases with an entire indifference to any search for poetical originality or any demand for novelty of thought and freshness of language. No pursuit of aesthetic grace, richness or beauty induces these mystic poets to vary the consecrated form which had become for them a sort of divine algebra..."

"The *Rg Veda* is one in all its parts. Whichever of its ten mandalas we choose, we find the same substance, the same ideas, the same images, the same phrases. The ṛṣis are the seers of a single truth and use in its expression a common language."²⁶

Bergaigne on his part says the following :

"I do not intend to trace back the historical development of the Vedic religion..., nor do I want to deprive myself of the light the comparison of passages borrowed from hymns of perhaps very different periods can bring into the exegesis. The sum of these comparisons will precisely prove that between the older and the newer hymns of the *Rg Veda* there has not been such a transformation of the Vedic religion that the more modern hymns may not be used to comment on the more ancient ones. At the most one can say that sometimes the latter contain only in germ what the former show in its full development.

25. S. Dasgupta, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

26. Śrī Aurobindo, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 & 62.

It is in this state of complete development, and as a system entirely finished, that the Vedic religion is presented in my book."²⁷

To us the unity of the Veda is not simply "a unity brought about by the logical development of thought from one period of Vedic history to another"²⁸, but a *doctrinal unity*, achieved perhaps at the end of many doctrinal struggles, but achieved nonetheless. Even admitting with Renou and others that the Vedic hymns might reflect "a troubled background" or even "a scene of passionate rivalries", one has also to admit that most of the internal struggles, which according to these authors would have brought about the eclipse of Varuṇa, the enthronement of Indra, the advent of Rudra, etc., had been overcome towards the period of the composition of the Saṁhitā, which shows unquestionably a great doctrinal synthesis. A proof of this synthesis are : (a) the conjoint invocations to gods supposed to have been in conflict, quite frequent in the hymns addressed to *all the gods* (cf. 1.106, 1.107, etc) ; (b) the numerous dual forms in which the names of gods who would have belonged to different cults appear together, for example, "indrā-somau", "indrā-varuṇau", "indrā-viṣṇū"... ; (c) the extension of the typical attributes of one god to gods of other cultural circles ; (d) the direct identification of gods supposed to have been rivals.

Whether this doctrinal synthesis had been achieved before the composition of the Saṁhitā or was an outcome of it, it is difficult to decide. The important fact is that it is clearly there and that it was bound to be there, since it is hardly imaginable that the poet-priests who decided to compile, classify and organise the mantra material that had been scattered and without a fixed literary form during the tumultuous period of the Aryan conquests²⁹ would have been unconcerned about its doctrinal coherence and would have allowed clear ideological discrepancies to creep in. The freedom of which the ṛṣis give proof in the compilation, distribution and

27. A Bergaigne, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. III.

28. R.N. Dandekar, *The Cultural Background of the Veda* University of Ceylon Review 1953, vol. XI, p. 138.

29. R.N. Dandekar, *loc. cit.* pp. 141-144.

arrangement of the mantras must have been coupled with a similar freedom to censor the material and eventually to reject whatever was not found suitable. The work of the ṛsis in the formation of the Saṁhita, technically known as "saṁhitā-karaṇa", must have been something more than a mere work of compilation, it must have been at the same time a work of discrimination and canonisation of the collected material. Whatever the ṛsis have admitted into the Saṁhita must have appeared to their eyes to be in keeping with the rest of the collection, even if it may not look so to alien eyes. It is in this sense that we feel justified in speaking of the doctrinal unity of the Veda.

Although, as we have said, our main point of reference is the *Rg Veda*, we do not hesitate to resort occasionally to the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads in search of corroborating examples of the same doctrine and as some sort of magnifying glasses which allow sometimes to see better what is already visible in the *Rg Veda*, but with less detail.

The method we propose to follow in the course of these pages is to let the texts speak as much as possible and to reduce to the minimum the commentary, which we would like to hold as a conducting thread helping to understand the nobility and depth of the Vedic conception of the sacrifice, which we take here for granted.

As for those who think that there is very little in the Veda that can appeal to mind or deep feeling, they are not likely to be disappointed by the results of their researches, "the only marvel" says Coomaraswamy "is why they undertake them at all. In the case of those who devote their lives to a study of the Vedas, despite an *a priori* conviction of their spiritually negligible content, one may well ask "yas tan na veda kiṁ ṛcā kariṣyati?" *What in fact can the Veda mean for these ?*"³⁰

That the Veda can mean very different things for different people is not a secret. One only needs to go over the various interpretations that have been given of it, to realize it :

30, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *op.cit.*, p. 100 Cf. *Rg Veda* 1, 164, 39.

- the ritualistic interpretation (Sāyana, etc.)
- the naturalistic interpretation (Max Müller, Bergaigne etc.)
- The evolutionistic interpretation (common to so many authors)
- the symbolic interpretation (Agrawala, etc.)
- the psychological interpretation (Śrī Aurobindo, etc.)
- the meta-physical³¹ interpretation (Coomaraswamy, etc.)

To us as to some of the mentioned authors, like Śrī Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy, the Veda is above all a Book of Wisdom. This evaluation has not been in our case a point of departure or a basic assumption, but rather the conclusion of a long enquiry that has convinced us of the sapiential character of the Vedic literature. However it would be false to affirm that we did not feel attracted from the beginning by the vigorous arguments of the Mimāṃsakas in favour of the “prāmāṇya” or validity of the Veda.

31. We choose this word used by Coomaraswamy himself for want of a better term.

I

BHUVANASYA NĀBHIḤ OR THE NAVEL OF THE WORLD

Creation is attributed in the Vedas either to the cultural work, or to the gods, or even to men. In the face of such apparent diversity of view-points one might well ask whether there was the slightest consensus of opinion among the Vedic Aryans regarding the matter. Some authors without clearly settling the question seem to incline themselves to the affirmative. Thus Bergaigne does not hesitate to consider the sacrifice as the origin of everything according to the Vedas. Says he :

"The sacrifice is to such an extent the principle *par excellence* that one ascribes to it not only the origin of men, but even that of the gods."

"More generally the sacrifice is conceived as the principle of all things. *The sacrifice is our father...our Manu*, says the author of the verse 10, 100, 5. To the question put in the hymn 1, 164, 34 : *I ask where is the navel of the world*, the following verse replies : *This sacrifice is the navel of the world*, and we know that this term navel is in the language of the Vedic ṛsis almost synonymous with the term father."¹

Lüders studying the question from another point of view considers *ṛta* as the first principle according to the Vedic conception. He says :

"Not much inquiry has been made about the meaning of *ṛta*. The more the pains taken to decipher the meaning of single mythological figures of the Vedic songs, the less the effort to properly deal with the Vedic religion as such, and therefore with *ṛta*, which constitutes the central point of this religion."

1. A Bergaigne, *La Religion Vedique*, vol. I, pp. 139 & 138.

"The Vedic language likes. . .to trace back every god to the concept, which forms the main feature of his being, mostly indeed under the image of filiation. Indra, who has the build and the force of a giant, is called *the Son of Strength* (*śavasah sūnuḥ*). In the same way other gods are called *born of the Truth*, because the Truth fills their whole being. . .

It is not astonishing that the Truth to which the gods owe their greatness, in fact their existence, would finally be presented to us as the world creating principle. By means of ṛta has the world come to being, by means of ṛta this or that god has extended threefold the heaven and the earth...

And just as by means of the Truth the world has come to being, in the same way it is also maintained by means of the Truth : *Ṛta is what the dawns radiate, ṛta, what the rivers stream, satya is what the sun spreads out.*"²

If, as Lüders thinks, the concept of ṛta has nothing to do with the concept of sacrifice³, then to the three possible principles of the world considered above one will have to add ṛta as a fourth one. However I cannot agree on this point with Lüders, for several reasons which I would summarise as follows :—

To begin with, ṛta does not only have specific relations to the Aryan cult, as Lüders himself admits, but it positively stands for the cultual work or sacrifice in a number of passages. Among them the following are especially clear :—

1. 105, 4 *I ask about my latest sacrifice* (*avamam yajñam pṛcchāmi*); *the messenger must tell it to me : Where is my previous ṛta gone* (*kva pūrvyrm ṛtam gatam*), *who possesses it now?*⁴

The sense of the stanza is : Where are my sacrificial works? How is it that I do not see the result of them? Has someone perhaps taken possession of them secretly? O Agni, unveil to me this mystery!

2. H. Lüders, *Varuṇa*, pp. 13, 23 & 24.

3. "Mit dem opfer hat der Begriff des Rta, soviel ich sehe, in den vedischen Hymnen überhaupt nichts zu tun." See H. Lüders, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

4. "yajñam pṛcchāmy avamam sa tad dūto vi vocati/ kva ṛtam pūrvyam gatam kas tad bibharti nutano...."

As Geldner has also understood the question put by the ṛṣi to Agni about the destiny of his ṛta is one with the question that he addresses to him immediately before about the destiny of his latest sacrifice. Hence the identity of both concepts in this context.

Another passage taking ṛta in the sense of yajña is undoubtedly 10. 122, 6.

*While you milk for the sacrifice-loving sacrificer the all-sustaining food from the teeming cow, o Sage, and while you illumine thrice a day the ṛtas (triḥ ṛtāni didyat), circumambulating the sacrifice (yajñam) with your back anointed with butter, you verily behave like a Sage, o Agni.*⁵

Even Lüders feels inclined to understand here under ṛta the sacrifice, since he says: "The translation *sacrifice*...for "ṛtāni" seems almost imperative in the case of 10.122.6 where it is said that Agni illumines three times the "ṛtāni" during his circumambulation round the sacrifice."⁶

Another decisive passage is 4.3.4 :

*Be attentive to this our work, the ṛta, o Agni (tvam cid agne asyāḥ naḥ śamyāḥ ṛtasya svādhiḥ bodhi), you who are the knower of ṛta*⁷

The fact that in this verse ṛta appears in apposition to "śamī", *das heilige Werk des Gottesdienstes*, as Grassmann renders it, enables us to consider both names as more or less synonymous, following for instance the same rule of interpretation used by Lüders when commenting on the expression "ṛtasya jyotiṣas paṭi" of 1.23.5, where he says: "the immediate proximity of "ṛta" and "jyotiḥ" enables us to conclude that both words refer to one and the same object."⁸

Very relevant also in this context is the stanza 3.31.9:

They sat down with fervent mind, making themselves a way to immortality with the help of the hymns; this sacrificial session of theirs

5. "iṣam duhan sudughām viśvadhāyaṣam yajñapriye yajamānāya sukrato/agne ghṛtasnuḥ triḥ ṛtāni didyat vartiḥ yajñam pariyan sukratuyase."

6. H. Lüders, *op. cit.*, p. 439.

7. "tvam cin naḥ śamyā agne asyā ṛtasya bodhy ṛtacit svādhiḥ."

8. H. Lüders, *op. cit.*, p. 619.

is even now frequent, by which ṛta (yena ṛtena) they wanted to conquer the months.⁹

Let us not bother now about the meaning of the last part of the verse and other doctrinal points alluded to in this passage but let us just look at the relationship that it establishes between "sadana" on one side and "ṛta" on the other. This relationship is further emphasized and clarified in the Commentary, which says :

"This session of the Ṃgiras is only the sacrificial session called "sattra"¹⁰, quite frequent at present, a great means indeed for the attainment of immortality. How?—It is said now : by means of the "ṛta", by which "sattra" or sacrifice, once become true, the Ṃgiras.. wanted to conquer the months..."

That amounts to saying that there is perfect coincidence between "ṛta" on one side and the sacrificial session or "yajña" on the other.

The same is found in the verse 8.12.13. It says :

4820. *Whom the inspired Āyus, presenting hymns, rejoiced (abhipramanduḥ), as the butter rejoices (ghṛtam na), when it swells in the mouth of ṛta (yat ṛtasya āsani pīpye).¹¹*

If the mouth of ṛta in which the butter melts rejoicing everybody, gods and men, means, it seems to me, the sacrificial fire, specifically called the mouth of the sacrifice in other places, then ṛta stands here, as in the rest of the quoted stanzas, for the good or holy work.¹²

9. "ni gavyatā manasā sedur arkaiḥ kṛtvānāso amrtatvāya gātum/idaṁ cin nu sadanāṁ bhūry eṣāṁ yena māsāṁ asiṣāsanṁ ṛtena".

10. Literally : is only the session during the sacrifice, called "sattra".

11. "yam viprā ukthavāhaso 'bhipramandur āyavaḥ/ghṛtam na pīpya āsany ṛtasya yat."

12. The same meaning has to be attributed to ṛta in the next two verses, which end exactly with the same words : "ṛtasya yat". They say :

Aditi also brought forth a hymn for the self-luminous Indra, an often sung one (puruprasastam), when they sing in order to help the ṛta (yat ṛtasya utaye).

"uta svarāje aditi stomam indrāya jījanat/puruprasastam utaya ṛtasya yat."

The ministering priests called him to help them, to show them favour (praśastaye), when the two haris of ṛta, o god, were not going in opposite directions (yat ṛtasya harī deva na vivratā).

“abhi vahnaya ūtaye'nūṣata praśastaye/na deva vivratā harī ṛtasya yat.”

The expression “ṛtasya harī” of our verse has a parallel in 4. 2. 3, where it is said :

The two ruddy steeds of ṛta who pour down blessings and melting butter I regard in my mind as the fastest (javiṣṭhā manasā manye).

“atyā vṛdhasnū rohitā ghṛtasnū ṛtasya manye manasā javiṣṭhā....”

Other verses in which ṛta has with all probability the meaning sacrifice, sacred work, are the following ones :

5.12.6 He who consecrates to you the sacrifice with homage, o Agni (yaṭ te namasā yajñam iṭṭe agne), is the one who protects the ṛta of the red bull (saḥ aruṣasya vṛṣṇaḥ ṛtam pāti). May he possess a wide, good dwelling and the offspring of Nahuṣa who propagates himself.

“yas te agne namasā yajñam iṭṭa ṛtam sa pāty aruṣasya vṛṣṇaḥ/ tasya kṣayaḥ pṛthur ā sādthur etu prasarsrāṇasya nahuṣasya śeṣaḥ.”

Another verse is 1.151.3 :

May the people, o bulls, extol your birth, praiseworthy in both the worlds, in order to obtain the great dexterity (mahe dakṣase), which you carry with you to the ṛta (yad im ṛtāya bharathah), when—for the sacrificer—you approach the sacrifice (yad arvate adhvaram pra viṭhaḥ) on account of the invocation and the ritual (hotrayā śimyā).

“A vām bhūsan kṣitayo janma rodasyoḥ pravācyam vṛṣṇā dakṣase mahe/yad im ṛtāya bharatho yad arvate pra hotrayā śimyā viṭho adhvaram.”

The way how Lüders renders these two stanzas is really unsatisfactory : in the case of the first stanza he destroys completely the parallelism that the Sanskrit-construction indicates between ṛta and yajña (yaḥ yajñam iṭṭe, saḥ ṛtam pāti), and in the case of the last stanza he gives a translation which is completely unintelligible.

A different shade of meaning is found in 10.179.3 where ṛta does not mean properly sacrifice but just oblation, as Sāyaṇa already points out and after him Grassmann and Ludwig. Lüders, for reasons which are difficult to explain, renders the word by song, although the whole hymn, consisting only of three verses, does not make a single reference to the cultural songs, but speaks merely of the sacrificial rites. The translation of the verse is :

Dressed is, I think, in the udder, dressed on fire, well dressed, I think, is this new ṛta (suśrātam manye tad ṛtam naviyah). Drink of the curd of the noon's libation, o Indra, you thunderer, whose deeds are many.

Apart from these passages in which the meanings *sacrifice cultural action*...for ṛta are perfectly clear, there are many others in which that sense is much more strongly suggested by the context than the meanings *truth* and *cultural song* alternatively proposed by Lüders. One can judge that for oneself by perusing the following quotations which are only a selection of the relevant passages : —

8.27.19 *When you, dear rulers, make the ṛta (ṛtam dadha), today, at dawn...*¹³

2.30.1 *The waters do not stand stand still for the god who makes the ṛta (ṛtam kṛṇvate devāya), Indra, the impeller, the slayer of Ahi.*¹⁴

6.15.14 *O Agni, when you will go today to the tribes, o bright-flamed hotṛ of the sacrifice, be yourself the sacrificer. May you offer the ṛtas (ṛtā yajāsi), when you unfold yourself in your greatness. Convey the offerings (havyā vaha), most youthful one, which (are entrusted) today to you.*¹⁵

7.39.1 *Agni, erect, has widened the good will of the Vasu; his glow turns up to the gods assembly. The two press-stones cover the path like two car-drivers; let the hotṛ, quickened, offer our ṛta (hotā iṣitaḥ naḥ ṛtam yajāti).*¹⁶

9.97.37 *Awaken, inspired, the Soma that flows brilliant, has sat down for the ṛtas of the sages in the containers (jāgrviḥ vipraḥ punānaḥ somaḥ ṛtā matinām ā asadat), he whom eagerly the two united adhvaryus serve, who drive with good hand the sacrificial car (suhastāḥ rathirāsaḥ).*¹⁷

“śrātam manya ūdhani śrātam agnau suśrātam manye tad ṛtam navīyah/mādhyamīdinasya savanasya dadhnaḥ pibendra vajrin purukṛj juṣānaḥ.”

13. “yad adya sūrya udyati priyakṣatrā rtaṁ dadha...”

14. “ṛtam devāya kṛṇvate savitra indrāyāhighne na ramanta āpaḥ.”

15. “agne yad adya viśo adhvarasya hotaḥ pāvakaśoce veṣ tvaṁ hi yajvā/ṛtā yajāsi mahinā vi yad bhūr havyā vaha yaviṣṭha yā te adya.”

16. “ūrdhvo agniḥ sumatīm vasvo aśret pratīcī jūrṇir devatātīm eti/bhejāte adri rathyeva panthām ṛtaṁ hotā na iṣito yajāti.”

17. “ā jāgrvir vipra ṛtā matinām somaḥ punāno asadac camūṣu/sapanti yaṁ mithunāso nikāmā adhvaryavo rathirāsaḥ suhastāḥ.”

In our opinion “matī” is to be taken here as personified. See Grassman, *Wib.* Cp. with the stanza 6.37.2.

The sense of *holy action, sacred work* that *ṛta* exhibits in several of the previous quotations agrees also with the more plausible etymology of the word, namely, the one that considers *ṛta* as a neuter verbal noun in -ta- derived from the root "ar" (I.-E* er)¹⁸ and analogous in its formation to

"iṣtam" : *desire* < "iṣ"
 "iṣtam" : *sacrifice* < "yaj"
 "cittam" : *understanding* < "cit"
 "bhūtam" : *being* < "bhū"
 "bhītam" : *fear* < "bhī"
 "gītām" : *song* < "gā"
 "sukṛtam" : *good work* < "kṛ"
 etc.¹⁹

18. Theoretically speaking *ṛta* could also be derived from the Indo-European root *ar-, which means *to unite, to keep together*. In that sense it would be related to Skr. "arah" : *spoke of a wheel*, "arpayati" : *to fix*, Gk. "ararisko" : *to keep together*, Lat. "artus" : *limb*, etc. If this were the case, then *ṛta* would approximately mean *what keeps together*, something like *Cosmic Bondage, Cosmic Order*.

This meaning however has been completely discarded by Lüders and I think rightly, since, apart from finding scarce support in the texts, it does not agree at all with the most important connotations of *ṛta*.

The identification of *ṛta* and the waters, for instance, prevents us from attributing to *ṛta* the meaning *what fixes or keeps together*, since such meaning is totally absent from the concept of waters in the Veda.

The identification of *ṛta* with *satya* or *the Truth* imposes on the other side the sense *what sets in motion, what acts to* *ṛta*, since such is everywhere the meaning of *satya* in the Vedas. See the question of "satya-kriya" in Lüders' monograph.

Finally the contraposition between *ṛta* and *anṛta* almost excludes the meanings *what fixes*, etc., for *ṛta*, on account of their excessive proximity to the ideas of constriction, oppression, and so on, which the concept of *anṛta* denotes.

Due to all this the derivation of *ṛta* from I.-E. *ar- seems to be rather improbable.

19. The external similarity between those neuter verbal nouns and the participles from which they originally derive, namely "iṣta" "bhūta"

A striking point about these verbal nouns in -ta- is the fact that they invariably keep their etymological sense, like the nouns in -van-, -vant-, etc., so that it is even possible to reconstruct their basic meaning once the sense of the root is known. Then bearing in mind that the fundamental sense of the root "ar" (I.-E* *er*) in the *Rg Veda* is *to set in motion* (the clouds, the dust, the sea, men, worlds, etc.)²⁰ one can say *a priori* that the approximate meaning of *ṛta* will be *what sets in motion, what acts, what works, action, work* a sense completely confirmed, as we have seen, by the previous quotations and very much in keeping with the associations of *ṛta* with "ap" and "satya", *the waters and the Truth*, in the *Rg Veda*.

Under these circumstances I think that there can be hardly any doubt about the primary meaning of *ṛta*, which besides seems to illustrate in a *logical* way several other meanings of the word, like *oath*²¹ *mantra*²² *truth* (in the sense of cosmic potence)²³ etc., all of them clearly related in the mentality of the ancients to the idea of efficacy, of operative power.

"bhīta", etc., accounts for the confusion made by Lüders (see p. 634) and others between "*ṛta*" participle and "*ṛta*" noun, in spite of the fact that the former has an adjectival character, a passive sense and it is very infrequent in the *Rg Veda* whereas the latter has a substantive character, an active sense and it is quite frequent in the *Rg Veda*.

20 See H. Grassmann, *Wtb.*

21. See 10.34. 12 : *To him who as the general of your great throng (and) as king has become the first of your host I stretch forth my ten fingers and pronounce this oath (ṛtam) : "I withhold no money."*

"yo vaḥ senānir mahato gaṇasya rājā vrātasya prathamō babhūva/ tasmai kṛṇomi na dhanā ruṇadhmi daśāhaṁ prācis tad ṛtam vadāmi."

22. See 3.55.3 : *In front of the flaming fire may we pronounce the sacred word (ṛtam id vadema) : "Great is the might, unique, of the gods "*

"samiddhe agnav ṛtam id vadema mahad devānām asuratvam ekam."

23. See 9.113.4 : *Speaking the Truth (ṛtam), pronouncing the Truth, performing the Truth, flow, Indu, around for Indra's sake.*

"ṛtam vadann.....satyaṁ vadant satyakarman/ ...indrāyendo pari srava."

Even accepting with Lüders that *ṛta* may primarily mean *Truth* it is evident that it does not mean the Truth in abstract, but the Truth as it was understood by the Indian Aryans, the Aryan Truth. Truth and Lie receive a peculiar shade of meaning according to the cultural and religious context. In Iran by Truth one understands the cult of Ahura Mazdāh, by Lie the cult of the daevas. Darius, the Zoroastrian king, goes so far as to equate the rebellion among his subjects with the Lie. "Do not leave the straight path, do not rebel", he says. For him, as partly for the same Zoroaster Lie means violation of the divinely appointed Order of Truth, onslaught against the established order²⁴. In India by Truth one understands the Aryan cult, by Lie, the anti-Aryan cult of the "yātu-dhānas", etc. Now, bearing in mind that the fundamental characteristic of this non-Aryan cult was not to sacrifice, or to be "ayajña". "ayajyu", "ayajvan", it comes out clearly that Lie means in the Vedic context not to sacrifice. Whence, by counterimplication, Truth must mean to sacrifice, the sacrifice. As a matter of fact the identification of the Truth with the sacrificial order is such that one does not conceive of any Truth outside the cultural sphere of the Aryans. That is the reason why in the Vedas *ṛta*, unlike "*vrata*", for example,²⁵ refers exclusively to the Aryan cult. The Aryan Truth is undoubtedly to sacrifice, for without "*yajña*" no "*ṛta*" of any kind is possible in the eyes of the Vedic Indians. Here one realizes the theological penetration of the subsequent tradition when it points out the formal identity of *ṛta* and *yajña*. See, for instance, *Atharva Veda* 12.1.1²⁶ and *Maitrayaṇa Samhitā* 1.10.12.²⁷

24. R.C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, p. 157.

25. "Vrata" is used not only to designate the laws or precepts of the gods (see 7. 76. 5, 10. 2.4, 10. 33. 9) but also what is contrary to them. In that sense the Dasyu is called in 8. 70. 11 and 10. 22. 8 "*anya-vrata*" : *He who follows other laws or precepts.*

26. "satyam brhad ṛtam ugram dikṣā tapo brahma yajñāḥ prthivim dhārayanti."

27. "ṛtam vai satyam yajñāḥ."

In view of all this we think that it is perfectly legitimate to take *ṛta* and *yajña* as synonymous, except where the context may demand an explicit distinction. To us the sacrifice is not merely a cultural counterpart of *ṛta*, as Konow says²⁸, but the very same *ṛta*, conceived as the primordial source from which originates the cosmos. The difference is one of connotations, and not of realities. In this assumption Bergaigne's and Lüders' opinions about the birth of the world according to the Veda have to be taken rather as complementary than as opposite. But even in this case the question of the origin of the universe according to the Veda is far from being settled. If the sacrifice is in the Vedic perspective, as it is elsewhere, just an intermediary between gods and men, a cultural act addressed to one or several gods and, in consequence, subordinated to them, then it is impossible to attribute to it a greater role than that of a mere means in the creation of the world. In order to become not just an intermediary principle but the first principle or cause of the world it is a condition *sine qua non* for the sacrifice not to end in the gods but to be above them in all respects. Now there are several points which indicate that this is really the case in the Veda: something, to say the least, peculiar, if we bear in mind the typical subordination of the sacrifice to the gods attested everywhere else. Victor Warnach after a long inquiry into the nature of the sacrifice, in the course of which he makes reference to a great variety of religious contexts reaches the conclusion that the sacrifice consists everywhere "in a concrete gift to a higher Being"²⁹ By higher Being he understands of course a higher Being than the sacrifice. In the Vedic perspective, however, the sacrifice is not ordained to something different or higher than itself, but at the most to a higher form of itself. *With the ṛta I worship the immovable* (*niyatam*) *ṛta*, says 4.3.9³⁰. The difference of standpoint between the Vedic conception of the sacrifice and the common one transpires in various points, for example, (a)

28. See St. Konow, in *Chantepie de la Saussaye*, p. 51f.

29. V. Warnach, "Vom Wesen des kultischen Opfers" in *Opfer Christi und Opfer der Kirche*, p. 58.

30. "ṛtena ṛtaṁ niyatam ṛta..."

in the mythical localization of ṛta at the top of the world, (b) in the subordination of the gods' sacrifice to a higher sacrifice which englobes it and gives efficacy to it, (c) in the final ordination of the sacrifice not to the gods but to itself.

Let us comment separately upon each of these points.

(a) *The mythical localisation of ṛta / yajña*

The supradominant character of ṛta is aptly described in the Veda by placing it at the top of the universe, beyond heaven—in the fourth plane, if we take heaven, atmosphere and earth as the three lower planes.

On this point it is interesting to quote some words of Lüders :

"We need not be surprised that ṛta in the Veda has not remained a mere concept... Quite often one speaks of *an abode of ṛta*—"ṛtasya sadana", "ṛtasya sadas", "ṛtasya sadman", "ṛtasya sādana", "ṛtasya yoni"—and the context does not leave the slightest doubt, that by this is meant some place in the universe, where one imagined ṛta to be present in a sensible form. Those expressions have found the most varied interpretations, or better said translations... I want to observe here at once, that according to the results of my investigation I cannot see in those expressions anything other than designations for *an abode of the Truth*, that is to say, an abode where dwells the Highest Power of the Truth dominating the spiritual as well as the physical world..."

"The difficult riddle verse 3. 56. 2 also refers (among other passages) to that highest heaven as the abode of ṛta... (It says :) "ṣaḍ bhārām eko acarān bibharty ṛtaṁ varṣiṣṭham upa gāva āguḥ/tisro mahīr uparās tasthur atyā guhā dve nihite darśy ekā". *Without moving One bears six loads, to the Truth, the highest, have approached the cows. Three great runners (?) stay below; two of them are hidden, one is visible.* . .

I do not presume to solve the riddle of the stanza, but one thing seems to me to be sure, that the indications refer to the image of the world which was familiar to the Vedic poets. The six loads are first of all undoubtedly the three heavens and the three earths. Who is the immovable Bearer,

it is difficult to say. . . To be Bearer of the entire world system could be eligible a being like Ahi Budhnya, who is undoubtedly identical with the Śeṣa of the later mythology. . . But these are only conjectures. It is however important that ṛta is designated here as “varṣiṣha”, which evidently has to be understood in a spatial sense. . . The three great ones that are below and are designated as “atyā”, as runners or mares, certainly not without intention and even may be in opposition to “acaran”, can hardly be anything other as—Ludwig already gused—than the celestial streams, which pour out from the highest primordial source... Here they are Ilā, Sarasvatī and Mahī. Only one of them, Sarasvatī, pours out from heaven to the earth and becomes quintuplicated in the five streams of the Panjab. It is the visible one, the other two remain invisible.”³¹

The idea of ṛta's supremacy receives an unequivocal formulation in one passage of the *Maitrāyaṇa Saṃhitā* often repeated in the Sūtras. It says :

*Ṛta alone is the highest; no one goes beyond ṛta; on ṛta this earth is founded*³².

The location of ṛta at the summit of the world is confirmed by the parallal location of the waters in the same place, if we bear in mind the identification made in the Veda of the waters with the ṛta.³³

31. H. Lüders, *op. cit.* pp. 584-589.

32. “ṛtam eva paramēṣṭhi. ṛtam nātyeti kim, ṛte bhūmir-iyam śritā” See also *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 1.5.5.1, *Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra* 8.4.2, *Gobhila Gṛhya-Sūtra* 2.1.7 etc.

33. About the mythical location of the waters at the summit of the world, see *Atharva Veda* 11.3.20, where, speaking of the mystic rice-cake, it is said : *In which the sea, the heaven, the earth, the three are placed, one under the other.* For other less explicit quotations see H. Lüders *op. cit.*, p. 111s. and W. Kirfel, *Die Kosmographie der Inder*, p. 39.

The counterpart to this mythical location of the waters is, as it was to be expected, the conception of their primordial character.

About this question it may be interesting to quote some words of Lüders :

"Before the remotest beginning of the world there were the primordial waters; from them the all has developed itself: (10, 121, 7) *When the great waters came, bearing the all as germ, begetting Agni, from there originated the unique living spirit of the gods;* (10.82.5) *That which is beyond heaven, beyond earth, beyond gods and asuras, what indeed was that, which the waters bore as the first germ, wherein all the gods saw themselves together?* and the answer runs: (10.82.6) *The waters bore him (the primordial being) as the first germ, in whom all the gods came together.* These waters are then commonly designated by the expression which already before was common for the heavenly waters; they are called "salila": (10.129.3) *In the beginning darkness was concealed by darkness; all this was unrecognizable water.*" (H. Lüders *op. cit.* p. 350)

The fact that these primordial and supreme waters have been directly identified with the abode of *ṛta* is a proof of the doctrinal coherence of the Veda.

Among the passages speaking in favour of this identification see the following ones:

9. 86. 25 *To the bosom of the waters, to the bosom of ṛta, the Āyus, the buffaloes, have sent off the seer.*

"*apām upasthe adhy āyavaḥ kavim ṛtasya yonā mahiṣā aheṣata.*"

1.144.2 *The milk cows belowed in his direction, having surrounded him in the bosom of ṛta, in the seat of the god. When he was dwelling outstretched in the bosom of the waters, then he absorbed the energies by means of which he moves himself.*

"*abhīm ṛtasya dohanā anūṣata yonau devasya sadane parivṛtāḥ/apām upasthe vibhṛto yad āvasad adha svadhā adhayad yābhir iyate.*"

9.64.17 *Clarified the swift Indus have gone cheerfully to the sea, to the bosom of ṛta.*

"*marmṛjānāsa āyavo vṛthā samudram indavaḥ/agmann ṛtasya yonim ā.*

9.66. 12 *To the sea have gone the Indus, to the bosom of ṛta, like the milk—kine to their stable*

"*acchā samudram indavo, stam gāvo na dhenavaḥ/agmann ṛtasya yonim ā.*"

etc.

In view of all these parallels it is not surprising that the *Naigantṛhuka* should consider "ṛtasya yonī" as one of the names for water: "udakasya namāni".

The location of ṛta at the top of the universe is equally confirmed by several passages of the Śruti which describe the *abode of the sacrifice* (sukṛtasya loka, sukṛtasya yoni) as placed at the same height³⁴, taking account of the identification made in verse 10. 85.24 of this 'sukṛtasya loka' with the 'ṛtasya yoni', or, which is the same, of the sacrifice with ṛta in their mythical locations³⁵. All these identifications point out towards the ultimate equivalence of expressions such as the *highest abode of ṛta*³⁶, the *supreme abode of the sacrifice*³⁷, etc., even if they are not directly brought together in any concrete context.

34. Among the passages which support the location of the "sukṛtasya loka" at the summit of the world are specially interesting *Atharva Veda* 9.5.1 where the wish is expressed that the sacrificial goats may reach the world of the "sukṛtaḥ" situated across the great darkness in the third firmament. Equally interesting is *Atharva Veda* 4.11.6 where the draught-ox which is supposed to sustain heaven, earth and atmosphere is considered a means of entering into the world of the "sukṛtam": *by whom the gods ascended heaven leaving their body behind, the navel of immortality, may we go by him to the world of the "sukṛtam" by the vow of the hot drink, by ascetism.* In *Atharva Veda* 11.1.37 the location of "sukṛtasya loka" is further made clear with the following words: *With the light with which the gods went up to the sky after having cooked the brahman rice-dish, to the world of the "sukṛtam", may we go with that to the world of the "sukṛtam", ascending the heaven, the highest firmament.* In *Vajaneyi Samhitā* 15.50 the "sukṛtasya lokaḥ" is identified with the *third back (surface) of the sky and the luminous realm of heaven*, namely with the highest heaven. In *Atharva Veda* 9.5.19 Agni is requested to know all that of ours in the world of "sukṛtam", *at the meeting of the ways.* The place where the ways meet is the same as the place where they separate, namely the summit of the world from where everything is supposed to start. See, J. Gonda, *Loka. World and Heaven in the Veda*, pp. 130-143.

35. *I place you unhurt together with your husband in the bosom of ṛta, in the world of the good work.*

"...ṛtasya yonau sukṛtasya loke' riṣṭām tvā saho-patyā dadhāmi."

36. See 1.43.9.

37. See 10.181.2.

The fact of placing ṛta in the highest plane, in the zenith, is by itself an unmistakable proof of its primordial and supra-dominant character, if we bear in mind that one of the fundamental characteristics of mythical thought is to identify the highest in a physical sense with the most powerful and also with the primogenial. In this perspective the zenith coincides with the "omphalos", *the navel of the world*, the point starting from which the entire cosmos, often conceived as an embryo, develops itself. In this sense a Rabbinical text affirms: "As an embryo proceeds from the navel onward, so God began the creation of the world from its navel onwards, and from thence it spread in different directions"³⁸. A similar idea is found in the Iranian tradition where the world is compared to a foetus coming out from a moist substance like semen, supposed to have emanated from Ohrmazd, who is considered both father and mother of creation³⁹.

The same symbolism appears in the *Rg Veda* where the cosmos is conceived as expanding outward from an original point, identified, as we have seen, with the sacrifice in verse 1. 164.35.

Whatever the tradition may be, the tendency to place the supreme Principle in the highest point of the world is present everywhere, without this being an obstacle to speak at the same time of its pervasion of the universe or of its mystical presence in concrete geographical points. Thus a Rabbinical text says that "The world was created, beginning at Sion"⁴⁰ and the Śruti does not hesitate to conceive the sacrifice celeb-

38. See M. Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, p. 43.

39. *The creation of Ohrmazd was fostered spiritually in such wise that it remained...intangible, in a moist state like semen. After this moist state came mixture like (that of) semen and blood: after mixture came conception, like a foetus...Even now on earth do men in this wise grow together in their mother's womb, and are born and bred. Ohrmazd by the act of creation is both father and mother of creation, for in that he nurtured creation in unseen (minok) form, he acted as a mother, and in that he created it in material form, he acted as a father. See Greater Bundahishn 16, 1-12.*

40. See M. Eliade, *op. cit. loc. cit.*

rated on earth as the "nābhi" or *navel* of the entire cosmos⁴¹.

Where God is the supreme principle, as in the Bible or in the Avesta, the very God is placed at the summit of the universe. Thus the *Psalm* 103 represents God as standing on a balcony built on the celestial waters, from where He sprinkles the mountains : *From your balcony, up there, you sprinkle the mountains* (v. 13). The entire theology of the Merkabah has as starting point a similar image. There the Throne and Car of the Lord of Hosts is placed in the highest point of the seven heavens, the Pole around which the hosts of angels and powers revolve. The spirit of the Jewish seer is raised up to the divine Throne through the celestial spheres, conceived as *palaces* or "hekkaloth". Within the seventh there is the *Throne* or "Merkabah", the primal image of the Pleroma containing all forms of creation.

In the Iranian tradition Ahura Mazdāh has also his throne in the supreme heaven, in the realm of eternal light, where a company of angels, surrounding him, carries out his commands.

Where the supreme principle is not God but something else, like the chaos, etc., the mythical location is ordinarily the same. Thus, for example, in the Mesopotomian conception, which according to Kirfel is the basis of the Indian cosmographic ideas, the waters conceived as the first principle are distinctly located at the summit of the world. As a matter of fact the Babylonians conceived above the firmament a celestial see from where the entire creation would proceed. As for the gods, they were located by them in a celestial mountain, the peak of which attained heaven and the base of which rested on the "apsu" or *lower waters*. They also spoke of the "kirib shami" or *interior of heaven* as the abode of the gods, a concept which bears a certain resemblance with the Vedic conception of the *bosom of the waters* or *bosom of ṛta* as the residence of the gods⁴².

It is surprising to see that even in Buddhism nibbāna is sometimes envisaged as highest in a physical sense. In this

41. See I. 164, 35. See also *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 4. 2. 4. 16; 3. 6. 3. 1-2, etc.

42. See W. Kirfel, *Die Kosmographie der Inder*, p. 31 ss.

connection the texts speak of the path leading to nibbāna as an ascension⁴³, which takes one to the end of the world⁴⁴ and describe the attainment of nibbāna as the attainment of the highest⁴⁵. Not only that, they even speak in one passage of some sort of focal point from which all good proceeds, including the nibbāna of the Pacceka Buddhas and the Buddhas. This passage is found in the *Khuddakapāṭha* (p.14) and is repeated in the *Siri-Jātaka* (284). It says :

There is a treasury of all good things, which both to gods and men brings their wishes... Lordship and government, imperial bliss, the crown of heaven are within that treasure. All human happiness, the joys of heaven, the attainment of nibbāna (nibbānasampatti), from out of that store is given... Salvation, understanding, training fit to make Pacceka Buddhas come from it... That this treasure, which represents the accumulated merits, was thought of as being placed in heaven, becomes clear from the following words of the Dhammapada (220); His meritorious deeds receive the meritorious man who has gone from this world to the next. The same idea can be traced in the Hindu⁴⁶ and Zoroastrian⁴⁷ traditions. All

43. See *Udāna* p. 92 : *At one time the Exalted one was staying at Rajagaha in the Bamboo Grove at the squirrels' feeding-place. Then the reverend Dobba, the Mallian, approached the Lord... and having greeted the Lord sat down at a respectful distance... (dnd) said this : "It is for me the time to attain parinibbāna." ... Then the reverend Dabba, the Mallian, got up from his seat and having greeted the Lord and made the "pradakṣiṇa" around him, rose into the air and sat cross-legged in the space, in the atmosphere. Then having entered upon the element of fire, rising from there, he attained parinibbāna...*

44. In the *Sutta Nipāta* (1133) the Buddha is called "lokantaḡū" and "sabbabhavātivatto", that is to say, the one who has gone to the end of the world and has passed beyond all existence.

45. In the *Majjhima Nikāya* (I, 386), Upālī after his conversion praises the Buddha in these terms : *Of him who has gone to the highest (sammagga-tassa)..., the aloof (pavivittassa), the attainer of the highest (aggapattassa) the crossed over (tiṇṇassa) (and) the helper across (tārayantassa) of this Lord the disciple am I.*

46. See *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1. 2. 6 : *The splendid offerings invite him with the words : "Come, come !", and carry the sacrificer by the rays of the sun, praising him and saluting him with pleasant speech : "This is your pure world of Brahman, the well made."*

47. Regarding this point Widengren says that in Iran "die Taten der Menschen gewissermassen eine zweite Persönlichkeit (sind), die dem

this proves the operative nature of the mythical images. It also proves beyond doubt the all-overpowering character of ṛta/yajña in the Vedic conception. This is to such a degree true that from the Vedic standpoint to reach the bosom of ṛta or of the waters represents the attainment of the highest power and sovereignty. This is one of the motives which impels the gods to climb up there. See as references 1. 25. 10 and 2. 38. 8 where Varuṇa is depicted as withdrawing into the aqueous womb whenever possible and as going to sit there for the sake of universal dominion. See also 3. 5. 7 and 5. 67. 2. where Agni is said to ascend to the fat womb desiring the desirable and Mitra and Varuṇa are prayed to grant their favour after sitting on the golden womb.

(b) *The subordination of the gods' sacrifice to a higher sacrifice*

The dependence of the gods' liturgy on a higher sacrificial order is expressed in various ways in the Śruti. First of all by depicting the devas and pitṛs as celebrating their liturgy in the bosom of ṛta, or within the waters, which, as pointed out, comes to the same. What is meant by these images is that both devas and pitṛs are totally surrounded, totally protected in the exercise of their sacrificial functions by the supreme power of ṛta or of the waters. In regard to this 5. 62. 1 says :

*Surely yon ṛta is covered by this ṛta there where they set free the horses of Sūrya*⁴⁸.

The point where the horses of the sun are set free at the end of the day is no doubt the seat of ṛta, the nocturnal abode of the sun and the stable where his horses, unyoked, rest till day-break⁴⁹. In this precise point it is said that the cultual

Verstorbenen begegnet und ihm willkommen heisst; diese tritt...der Seele in Gestalt eines schönen Mädchens entgegen..., das die Seele mit deren Vorrat an guten Taten empfängt." See G. Widengren. *Die Religionen Irans*, p. 39.

48. "ṛtena ṛtam apihitam dhruvaṃ vām sūryasya yatra vimucanty aśvān..."

49. This is the same point where the horses of the sun are harnessed early morning and from where the dawns come out at day-break. "From this seat of ṛta—says Lüders—come out the dawns: *From the seat of ṛta the godlike dawns, awakening, come nigh like troops of cattle. When*

work that Mitra and Varuṇa perform is completely covered by ṛta, which the commentary hastens to identify with the waters: "ṛtena udakena apihitam".

The same thing is said of the pitṛs with a slightly different image in verse 1. 159. 4 :

*The refulgent sages weave always a new web in heaven within the sea*⁵⁰.

The texture that the pitṛs weave in heaven, within the waters and under their protection is the sacrifice, which 10. 130. 1 expressly describes under the figure of a weft :

*The sacrifice which is extended in all directions by means of its threads, which is spread out with the help of hundred and one divine works, that weave these fathers. They sit in front of the weft and say : "Weave, unweave !"*⁵¹

As the previous verses point out this weft of the celestial sacrifice is woven under the shelter of the supreme ṛta. The same relation of inclusion of one in the other is expressed, it seems to us, in verse 10. 121. 8, where the generation of the sacrifice within the bosom of the waters is spoken of.

The fact of placing the liturgy of devas and pitṛs within the supreme ṛta and under its protection amounts to subordinating all the celestial inhabitants to it, since according to the Śruti their whole power precisely takes root in their sacrificial action.⁵²

Another way of expressing the same subordination is by pointing out the dependence of the sacrificial action of the gods in regard to a higher ṛta or yajña.

Among the relevant texts 10. 90. 16 is pre-eminent:

Agni flames up (i.e. early morning) the red dawns rejoice within the bosom of ṛta. From there also out the horses of the sun : The winged horses approached in haste from the seat of ṛta. There, in the seat of ṛta, stay also the gods : Soma, knowing the way; goes there where he meets the gods, to sit in the bosom of ṛta..." Cf. H. Lüders, *Varuṇa*, p. 25.

50. "...navyam navyam tantum ā tanvate divi samudre antaḥ kavayah suditayah."

51. "yo yajño viśvatas tantubhis tata ckaśataṁ devakarmebhir āyataḥ/ ime vapanti pitaro...pra vayāpa vayety āsate tate."

52. See, for example, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3, 1. 4. 3.

*With the help of the sacrifice the gods offered the sacrifice : these were the first foundations, of the world as well as of the sacrificial order.*⁵³

The theological importance of this verse, which occurs twice in the *Rg Veda*, appears from the frequency with which it is quoted and commented in other passages of the *Śruti*, often in different ways.

Taking to account the context, which speaks of the dismemberment of *Puruṣa*—spoken of as “*haviṣ*” or *oblation* on one side and as “*yajña*” or *sacrifice* on the other⁵⁴—one can paraphrase the verse as follows :

With the help of the sacrifice the gods dismembered or scattered the sacrifice, that is to say, the Puruṣa.

Speaking on this point the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (10.2.2. 1-2) says :

And, indeed, there was no other (victim) meet for sacrifice but that one (Prajāpati), and the gods set about offering him up in sacrifice.

Wherefore it is with reference to this that the ṛṣi has said : “The gods offered up the sacrifice with the help of the sacrifice”—for with the help of the sacrifice they did offer up him (Prajāpati), the sacrifice :—“these were the first ordinances”,—for these laws were instituted first.

Not only the gods in the begining of creation but also the *pitṛs* appear to us as celebrating in heaven their sacrifice by virtue of another sacrifice, which can be called without much hesitation the supreme sacrifice. In reference to this 5. 15. 2 says :

*By means of the sacred work they maintained in force the all-supporting sacred work in the highest heaven, the helper of the sacrifice, they who by means of the born ones had attained the unborn heroes, settled in the firm support of the sky*⁵⁵.

This verse presents several difficulties of interpretation which it is not necessary for us to elaborate here. Let us

53. “*yājñena yajñam ayajanta devās tāni dharmāṇi prathamāny āsan...*”

54. See 10.90. 6 & 7.

55. “*ṛtena ṛtam dhāruṇam dharayanta yajñasya sāke parame vyoman/ divo dharman dharuṇe seduṣo nṛṇ jātair ajātām abhi ye nanakṣuh.*”

comment only on its general meaning which is clear : the pitṛs do not fail to maintain in heaven the same sacrificial order they had maintained on earth and they do it by virtue of a sacrificial order, which is undoubtedly superior.

Other passages also point out in different ways the dependence of the gods' sacrifice on a higher sacrifice. Let us quote them in a concise manner.

The verse 7. 56. 12 presents the Maruts as reaching the plane of Truth after having sacrificed by virtue of the sacrifice. It says :

*Having attended to the sacred work by virtue of the sacred work they came to the Truth.*⁵⁶

A similar idea is expressed in 5. 68. 4 regarding Mitra and Varuṇa :

*Having attended to the sacred work by virtue of the sacred work they attained the powerful Dakṣa. The two gods wax devoid of guile.*⁵⁷

Another verse, 8. 86. 5, similarly tells us how Savitṛ performs his sacrificial functions by virtue of a higher sacrificial order :

*With the help of the sacred work Savitṛ performs the sacrificial work (śamāyate)*⁵⁸.

Almost the same is said of Agni in 5. 12 3 :

*In which way (kayā) will you take notice again of our hymn, O Agni, you who by virtue of the sacred work perform the sacred work (ṛtena rtayan).*⁵⁹

"Ṛtayan" is the present participle of "ṛtayati", a denominative of ṛta, which means to perform the ṛta, very close in meaning to the verb "śamāyati" of the previous stanza, which is likewise a denominative.

Expressions such as *may the sacrifice prosper by virtue of the*

56. "...ṛtena satyam ṛtasāpa āyañ chuciṇmānaḥ śucayaḥ pāvakāḥ."

57. "ṛtam ṛtena sapanteṣiraṁ dakṣam āśāte/adruhā devau vardhete."

58. "ṛtena devaḥ savitā śamāyate..."

59. kayā no agne ṛtayann ṛtena bhuvo navedā ucathasya navyaḥ..."

sacrifice or by means of the sacrifice I will perform the sacrifice⁶⁰, etc., which occur in later portions of the Śruti with reference to the earthly sacrificers help us to understand the meaning of the previous quotations regarding the celestial sacrificers. The meaning is that just as the earthly sacrifice is conditioned by a higher sacrifice, in the same way the sacrificial order in heaven is conditioned by a higher sacrificial order, thanks to which the celestial inhabitants—taken either collectively or individually (see the quotations)—celebrate their own ṛta or yajña. That this supreme sacrificial order completely overpowers not only the celestial liturgy but also the divine priests themselves comes out clearly from the words of 1. 23. 5 where Mitra and Varuṇa are significantly called “those who are lords of ṛta by virtue of ṛta (yau ṛtena ṛtasya pati).”⁶¹ There can hardly be a more categorical way of expressing the total dependance of the gods on the ṛta that we call supreme.

To us this supreme ṛta or yajña does not represent the sacrifice of the Puruṣa but rather the birth of the Puruṣa (agra-taḥ jātam),⁶² who has ultimately to be identified with the *First Born of Rta* (prathamajā ṛtasya) and with the *Son of the Waters* (apām napāt). It is the birth of the superior Fire in the bosom of the immortal Waters. This generation can be called ṛta because it sets in motion everything, or because it has the intrinsic character of truly acting in accordance with its aspect of “satya”.⁶³ It can be called yajña because it creates everything. *To create, to produce* is one the fundamental meanings of the root “yaj” in the Śruti.⁶⁴ On the other side, it can also be called yajña because it immolates, it destroys the quiet-

60. See *Vajaneyi Samhita* 9. 21, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1. 1. 2. 7, 1. 3. 1. 21, 3. 2, 2. 7, etc.

61. “ṛtena yāv...ṛtasya...pati...”

62. See 10. 90. 7.

63. See H. Lüders, *op. cit.*, ch V “Die Satya-kriyā”, pp. 486-508.

64. See Grassmann, *Wtb* See also *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* 25.18. 1-2 where it is said that by means of a thousand years sacrificial session the All-Emanators (“viśvasṛjaḥ, i.e., all the powers participating in the act of creation) emanated all the universe. See also 10.88.9 where it is said that the gods have sacrificed (=engendered through the sacrifice) all the worlds.

ness and aloofness of the primordial reality, by its very activation. According to an Indian proverb the birth of the son is the death of the mother.⁶⁵

With this Puruṣa, as an oblation, the gods performed their sacrifice—we have been told—and thus was inaugurated the sacrificial order of the gods, which basically consists in the extension of the original sacrifice. Lastly, as 10. 181. 3 says, men discovered, searching in their heart, and praying, the sacrifice that had descended from heaven and taking it under their care by divine inspiration they inaugurated the liturgical order on earth.

The three mentioned sacrificial orders correspond broadly speaking to the three sacrifices often mentioned in the texts: that of heaven, that of the middle region and that of earth : which correspond in their turn to the three stations of Agni. Projected in time they correspond to the three sacrifices celebrated at dawn, at noon and at evening.

The supreme sacrifice is the model of the other two in accordance with the words of the hymn 10. 130.

What was the measure and the model, what was the basis..when all the gods sacrificed the (first) god ?

*To it conformed themselves the human ṛṣis, our parents, when the sacrifice was born in times of old.*⁶⁶

If the original sacrifice coincides, as we think, with the birth of the supreme fire, then the Vedic conception of creation through the sacrifice does not fundamentally differ from the idea, later very much emphasized, of creation through "tapas", through the calorific activation of Brahman, Ātman, the Waters, etc., that is to say, through the activation of the first substance. In that case the identification between yajña and tapas, which we find in several passages becomes perfectly understandable.

65. In the *Rg Veda* it is already said that Agni as soon as born devours his parents.

66. v. 3 "Kāṣīt pramā pratimā kim nidānam...yad devā devam ayajanta viśve."

v. 6. "cakṣpre tena ṛṣayo manuṣya yajñe jāte pitaro nāḥ purāṇe..."

(c) *The final ordination of the sacrifice to itself*

Although the gods appear everywhere as the consignees of the sacrifice it is not rare to find them in the Śruti as mere conveyors of it. The goal of the sacrifice in this case far from being the gods is *the seat of ṛta* (ṛtasya sadas) or *the native place of the sacred work* (sukṛtasya yoni), which, as pointed out, coincide with each other.⁶⁷ It is, in other words, the highest station of ṛta or ṛta in its highest form. In this regard verse 3.29.8 implores Agni to place the earthly sacrifice in the bosom of the *good work*, "sādāya yajñam sukṛtasya yonau". This verse has not been overlooked by the subsequent tradition which comments on it time and again when speaking of the final ordination of the earthly sacrifice.

Verse 8.41.8 expresses in our opinion much the same idea but under a different image. Here instead of Agni, Varuṇa is the one who conveys the sacrifice and instead of the bosom of ṛta the stanza refers to the bosom of the waters as the final destination of the sacrifice. It says :

Like a hero climbing up the sky, thus rises the hidden ocean, when he (Varuṇa) deposits in its bosom⁶⁸ the sacrifice. With his radiant foot he overthrew their magic and went up to heaven. Let all strangers die away!⁶⁹

In the same tenor verse 9.86.25 tells us that the priests send Soma, considered as the oblation *par excellence* and even as the very sacrifice, to the supreme bosom of ṛta and of the waters :

To the bosom of the waters, to the bosom of ṛta, the āyus, the buffaloes, have sent off the seer.⁷⁰

The same destination is given to Soma in 9.64.17 and 9.66.12.

67. See note 35.

68. Literally : in them (in the waters).

69. "sa samudro apīcyaś turo dyām iva rohati ni yad āsu yajur dadhe/ sa māyā arcinā padāstṛṇān nākam āruhau nabhantām anyake."

70. "apām upasthe adhy āyavaḥ kavim ṛta ya yonā mahiṣā aheṣata."

*Clarified, the swift Indus have gone cheerfully to the sea, to the bosom of ṛta.*⁷¹

*To the sea have gone the Indus, to the bosom of ṛta, like the milk-kine to their stable.*⁷²

The final ordination of the sacrifice to the sacrifice is often thrown into relief in the literature of the Brāhmaṇas. Thus, for example, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (4.4.4.13.14) says :

*Having thus completed the sacrifice, he establishes it in that sacrifice and thus unites sacrifice with sacrifice, (saying): "O sacrifice, go to the sacrifice, to the Lord of the sacrifice, to your own womb !"*⁷³

In accordance with these words the ascension of the sacrifice to its supreme seat appears as a return to its point of departure, to its womb. From this angle of vision the ascent of the sacrifice presupposes in fact its descent, so that one can imagine the sacrifice as describing a circular trajectory, which starts in the highest heaven, passes through the earth and ends again in the highest heaven. The trajectory represented in the eyes of the Vedic ṛsis the entire dynamism of the spiritual order, alluded again and again when speaking of the circular courses of the gods, of the return of the dead to their own home etc. In fact, the entire creation could be described in the Vedic perspective as following a similar trajectory. This is also the case in other religious milieus. Among some early Christian theologians, for instance, "all worldly existence is a finite trajectory between a beginning and an end", says Hans Urs von Balthasar. "However the unfolding of the multiplicity (which accompanies it) warns us against taking this trajectory in a too much simple and rectilinear sense."

"The movement of the worldly existence cannot be clearly determined, although it has to be taken as an *out and back* between the bounds of the finite. The true Unity is above the entire circle of creation. (And yet) the divine and inexpressi-

71. "marmrjānāsa āyavo vṛthā samudram indavaḥ/ agmann ṛtasya yonim ā"

72. "acchā samudram indavo' staṁ gāvo na dhenavaḥ/agmann ṛtasya yonim ā."

73. See also *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.2.2.7; 1.1.4.3.

ble Monad which is called God himself stands in its beginning and at its end...''⁷⁴

The localization of the sacrifice in its source is symbolically represented in the ritual by the use of the black-deer skin, which the *Taittiriya Sāmhita* (5.4.4.4.) defines as *the form of holy power*. On this black-deer skin soma is placed and on it also takes place the rite of initiation. The significance is that by means of it soma and the initiate are symbolically established in the supreme plane. As the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (1. 1. 4. 3.) says, the black antelope skin is also used for husking and bruising (the rice) on, in order that nothing of the oblation may get spilt ; and that if any grain or flour should now be spilt on it, the sacrifice would still remain securely established in the sacrifice. To secure the establishment of the sacrifice in the sacrifice is the principal ritual function of the black-deer skin, which as the same *Brāhmaṇa* points out, stands both for the sacrifice and for the threefold science which is identical with it.

As for the aim of the operation it seems to have been variously conceived. The sacrifice was regarded as ascending to heaven in order to provoke a new descent of the waters of plenty, or also in order to be stored there in the form of merit, or simply in order to complete successfully its circular trajectory. Let us briefly comment on this threefold end.

On one side the establishment of the sacrifice in the bosom of *ṛta* or of the waters seems to have in some passages a renovating character, in the sense of provoking a further effusion of the waters, a new descent of the creative and nourishing streams. The reaction of the heavenly ocean receiving the sacrifice that *Varuṇa* has succeeded in depositing in its bosom despite the attacks of the enemies is, as we have seen, a powerful agitation of its waters, foretelling a copious effusion. In that sense the action of the sacrifice in the waters is comparable to that of *Indra*'s weapon when he hurls it into the sea, setting its waters in motion. The netly renovating character which the conquest of the waters by *Indra* has is the same that the sacrifice has in this perspective. The sacrifice, like the "vajra" of *Indra*, has here the function of preventing

74. H. Urs von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, p. 107.

the regression of the cosmos into the chaos by pregressive draught.⁷⁵

Another aim of the establishment of the sacrifice in its native place is in some passages the accumulation of merits. It is a fundamental Vedic idea that sacrifices and good works (*iṣṭā-pūrta*) are susceptible of being stored in the form of merits in the highest heaven. A similar conviction is found, as we have said, in Iran and has survived in Buddhism, which shows its pan-Aryan character. According to the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (1. 2. 6), for instance, the oblations and sacrifices accumulated in the "*sukṛtasya loka*" receive the sacrificer at his death and lead him to the world of Brahma. Moreover, in certain passages they are even described as forming a glorious body for the sacrificer in the next world. The epithet "*stoma-taṣṭāsaḥ*" which the *pitṛs* receive in one passage of the *Rg Veda* alludes perhaps already to this belief.

Finally the ascensional return of the sacrifice to its point of departure seems to mean simply in some places the successful completion of its trajectory. Its aim is merely in this case the renovation or reconstruction of Prajāpati's body, the infusion of new life to the sacrifice,⁷⁶ the replenishment of the water-reservoir in the highest heaven, apparently exposed to diminution, on account of its perennial outflow.⁷⁷

75. See M. Eliade, "Structure et Fonction du mythe cosmogonique" in *La Naissance du Monde*, p. 484. In the hymn 1. 103 the poet sets in relation his present troubles (vv 7-8) with some possible misadventure of his latest sacrifice (vv 4-5) and attributes the re-establishment of normality to the fact that his sacrifice has finally attained its destination (v 12).

76. See *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 4. 2. 3. 10-14 where it is said that one draws several spoonfuls of soma and pours them for various gods, and for the life of the sacrifice: "*Thee, the god-pleasing, I take for the gods, for the life of the sacrifice* (11). With: "*This is thy womb; thee for the songs of praise!*" he deposits it; for he indeed takes it for the songs of praise (10)...

77. See *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3. 9. 3, 27: He then takes (water) with, "*I draw thee up for the inperishableness of the ocean*"; for the ocean is water; he thus confers inperishableness upon the waters; wherefore in spite of so much food (and drink) being consumed, the waters are not diminished.

Whatever aims the sacrifice was expected to fulfil by reaching the supreme plane the mere fact of considering it as ultimately ordained to itself and not to the gods implies a complete overstepping of the traditional idea of its subordination to the gods. The contrary is here the truth, for the gods do not appear anymore in this conception as the consignees of the sacrifice, but only as its conveyors, which is equivalent to placing them below the sacrifice, to subordinating them to it.

We reach the same conclusion by analyzing the various existential relations of the gods with the supreme *ṛta*, for the gods appear in a multitude of passages as being born, growing, nourishing themselves, resting in the seat of *ṛta*, that is to say, with a relationship of total dependance on the supreme *ṛta* in the order of being. But about this we will speak in more detail in the next chapter. Let us just state here in passing that the dependance of the gods on *ṛta* regarding their action, to which we have referred above, has its natural basis on this existential dependance of theirs on the same *ṛta*.

From this whole analysis the character of "supreme principle" which the complex *ṛta/yajña* exhibits in the Veda is I think more and more clear. And yet what seems to be a sound conclusion is apparently contradicted by a number of passages here and there which celebrate the concrete gods or even men as creators of the world.

Such an anomaly lends itself undoubtedly to be interpreted as a proof of a doctrinal fluctuation in the Veda, which, despite the effort of unification accomplished under the pressure of the priestly orthodoxy in the work of the promulgation of the *Samhita*, would have never overcome completely certain doctrinal discrepancies. This is a possibility which we would not deny. However, before reaching hasty conclusions it will be good to ponder over the different ways in which creation can be attributed to gods or men in the Vedic perspective, without impugning the supremacy of *ṛta*. As a matter of fact there are two ways in which creation can be attributed to gods or men in the Vedas : first of all *qua* sacrificers, secondly *qua* sacrifice.

As sacrificers gods and men accomplish by means of the sacrifice whatever the sacrifice does. Nothing of what the sacrifice does escapes in this sense from the jurisdiction of the sacrificers, who as the Brāhmaṇas insist time and again are *lords of the sacrifice*.⁷⁸ If in the Vedic context it is perfectly normal to ascribe the results of the sacrifice even to merely integral elements of it, like the divine praise, the sacrificial butter, etc.,⁷⁹ how much more to the sacrificer, who is not only an integral element of the sacrifice, but its very lord. Through the sacrifice the sacrificers become really omnipotent. In this connection the *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3. 1. 4. 3) says that *By means of the sacrifice the gods attained that supreme authority which they now wield*.⁸⁰ The same thing can be said regarding the earthly sacrificers,⁸¹ who by virtue of the essential identity between the earthly sacrifice and the supreme one not only exercise all the cosmogonic functions of the gods,⁸² but also somehow acquire dominion on the very same gods, subordinated, as we have seen, to the supreme ṛta. In this sense one can perfectly well explain the Vedic texts that place the gods under the command of man without any need of reducing the liturgy on earth to mere magic. Magic is at any rate the attempt to dominate the superior with the inferior, not the attempt to dominate the superior, with what is superior to it.

78. See *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.1.2.12 : *For Lord of Sacrifice is the sacrificer.*

79. See 6.51.8 : *The homage is mighty. I invoke the homage. The homage supports earth and heaven.*

“nama id ugraṁ nama ā vivāse nama dādāhāra pṛthivīm uta dyām...”

See also 4. 58. 11 : *On your being, (o Butter), is based the entire world.*

“dhāman te viśvaṁ bhuvanam adhi śritam...”

80. See also *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 8.4.3.2.

81. See *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 2.4.3.3 : *By means of the sacrifice the gods then accomplished all that they wanted to accomplish; and so did the ṛṣis.*

82. “Il ne faudrait pas croire d'ailleurs que l'attribut de l'humanité fût dans les idées védiques incompatible avec les hautes fonctions cosmogoniques qui sont attribuées aux pères en question dans les vers 10.56. 4-6, et dans bien d'autres. Nous verrons en effet plus loin que par le sacrifice, les anciens prêtres ont exercé toutes celles qui auraient du être, à ce qu'il semble, le privilège des dieux.”

See A. Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique* Vol I, p. 99.

And such is the case of the sacrifice in regard to the gods from the Vedic standpoint.

Here is a first way in which creation can be attributed to gods and men in accordance with the Vedas without throwing down the supremacy of ṛta/yajña. Another way in which this attribution is justifiable is by virtue of the identity that the Veda eventually establishes between the sacrificer and the sacrifice. This identification is based on several reasons which are worth while examining.

The first reason for it is according to the Śruti the performance of the sacrifice by the sacrificer. Here are the words of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.3.2.1 in regard to this point : *Now the sacrifice is the man. The sacrifice is the man for the reason that the man spreads (performs) it ; and that in being spread it is made exactly the same extent as the man : this is the reason why the sacrifice is the man.*⁸³ What this text means is that the effect is somehow preexistent in the cause. Man could never perform the sacrifice without possessing it in one way or other. From the Vedic standpoint the performance of the sacrifice is not just an external performance ; it is rather the externalization of something which lies within. In regard to this the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3. 1. 4. 12) says : *For by his own mind he purposes to sacrifice and from his own mind he impels it (the sacrifice) when he performs it.* The sacrifice is something which has to be taken hold from the mind, says another text.⁸⁴ Without first conceiving the sacrificial fire within, it would be of little avail to kindle the external fire and pour in it the libations. In this connection the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (7.4.1.1) says : *Being about to build Agni, he takes him up into his own self. . . Now were he to build up Agni without taking him up into his own self, he would beget man from man, mortal from mortal, one not free from sin from one not freed from sin ; but when he builds up Agni after taking him up into his own self, he causes Agni to be born from Agni, the immortal from*

83 See also *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.2.3.12 : *...As that sacrifice was collected, so does he who is consecrated now become the sacrifice, for it is he that carries it on, that produces it.*

84. See *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.1.3.26 *Now when he says : "Hail, from the mind (I take hold of) the sacrifice," he takes hold of it from the mind...*

the immortal, the sinless from the sinless. Having the sacrifice first of all within one is able to beget it without, and, being the father of the sacrifice, the sacrificer identifies himself by nature with it. What is valid in the case of men is no doubt equally valid in the case of the gods. Thus the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (4. 5. 1. 13) speaking of Agni, the divine priest *par excellence*, tells us explicitly that *All sacrifices are Agni, since all sacrifices are performed in him, the domestic sacrifices as well as others.* This is a perfectly logical way of reasoning.

When one thinks that the entire creation is called to perform in one way or another the sacrifice one does not wonder at the character of omnipresence that the Śruti attributes to the cultural work : *Rta is what the dawns radiate,*⁸⁵ *rta, what the rivers stream.*⁸⁶ The sacrifice is within everything, for everything is called to perform it in one way or another. The sacrifice is in a sense so intimate to everything that the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (14.3.2.1) does not hesitate to call it the self of everything : *All that is, all the gods have a single life-principle the sacrifice.* As Sylvain Levi says : "all beings commune to say so in it". "One incarnates it at will in Prajāpati or in Viṣṇu, or in the faithful who offers the sacrifice or in the priests that it employs ; in fact it is diffused everywhere ; it resides in a latent state in all that is, since *all that is partakes of the sacrifice*".⁸⁷ This diffusion however should not be understood in a pantheistic sense, but rather as the fundamental capacity of everything to immolate itself, to sacrifice its own separateness in order to regain the original unity or, to say the same in another way, in order to reconstruct the body of Prajāpati.

It is particularly in this capacity that the sacrificer is the sacrifice and not merely because he performs it. Or better said, from the Vedic standpoint the mere performance of the sacrifice is not enough ; it is also necessary to fall a prey to the sacrifice, so that it catches hold of oneself. To sacrifice is to

85. See 4.2.19 : "ṛtam avasrann uśaso vibhātiḥ."

86. See 1.105. 12 : "ṛtam arṣanti sindhavaḥ"

87. See Sylvain Levi, *La doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brāhmaṇas*, pp. 81 and 77.

be sacrificed. To that refers the appellative of "yajamāna" which the sacrificer commonly receives and which as participle of the middle voice has of necessity a reflexive sense, to wit, *he who sacrifices himself*. In that sense the *Śatāpatha Brāhmaṇa* (3.3.4.21) tells us that the sacrificer becomes a prey to Agni and Soma : *Now Agni and Soma have seized him, who consecrates himself, between their jaws . . . and the offering is he himself who is consecrated : thus they have seized him between their jaws*. The same idea is repeated in 3.6.3.19 with the following variant *And he himself that consecrates himself is the food of the gods*. What is said of the earthly sacrificers in general applies also to the heavenly sacrificers, the gods, who according to the *Brāhmaṇas* feel the urge of immolating their wondrous forms and powers for the sake of keeping their supremacy over the *Asu ras*.⁸⁸ Now this immolation which the gods make in favour of Indra is explicitly called a sacrifice in the *Śatāpatha Brāhmaṇa* 12.8.1.1.

In sum, the sacrificer is the sacrifice not only by the fact of sacrificing, but above all by the fact of sacrificing himself. It is this self-sacrifice which gives the right to the attainment of the supreme sacrifice and to the identification with it. In this regard the *Atharva Veda* (9.5.22) promises an unlimited world and an unlimited "yajña" to the man who performs certain sacrificial rites. Who sacrifices himself here on earth does it with the intention of uniting himself with the sacrifice in the highest heaven. It is in this sense that one has to understand the words of *Atharva Veda* 6.124.1 : *May I be joined with Indra's power...with the oblations, with the work done by the good sacrificer*. The sacrifice with which the sacrificer wants to be united is not just his own sacrifice, but his own sacrifice after having attained the supreme sacrifice and having merged in it. It is in fact the supreme sacrifice as the gathering point of all sacrifices as well as their birth-place or starting point (*sukṛtasya yoni*)⁸⁹. A distinction between the one and the

88. See *Śatāpatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.4.2. 1-16.

89. Renou translates "sukṛtasya yoni" by *le séjour natale de l'oeuvre pie*, whereas Gonda prefers the translation : *the 'place' in which the supreme universal truth and order reproduces itself* See J. Gonda, *Loka. World and Heaven in the Veda*, pp. 142-143.

others finds no support in the texts. As a matter of fact an expression such as "sukṛtasya loka" can be equally rendered by *the abode of the sacrifice* as well as by *the gathering point of the sacrifices, the sphere of ritual and religious merits*.⁹⁰

The idea of the attainment of the highest sacrifice on the part of the sacrificer is perfectly well expressed in the *R̥g Veda* by means of the compound "medha-sāti", which means verbatim *the conquest of the sacrifice*. The sense of this conquest clearly deduces itself from the words of 4.37.6-7.

*The mortal, whom you and Indra help, o R̥bhus, must be successful in the conquest of the sacrifice,*⁹¹ *aided by the prayers and by the divine steed (Agni).*

*Make free for us the paths, o Vājas, o R̥bhukṣans, so that we may sacrifice. (Make free) for us all the regions, o praiseworthy leaders, so that we may cross.*⁹²

The conquest of the sacrifice means in our opinion the same as the conquest of the waters (ar̥ṇa-sāti) and the conquest of the sun (svarsāti), that is to say, the conquest of the supreme plane, of which we will speak at length in chapter VI.

The identification between the sacrificer and the sacrifice is not exclusive to the Brāhmaṇas : it is already found in the *R̥g Veda*. Thus 9.7.3. names Soma, the true sacrifice,⁹³ 3.26.7 calls Agni the oblation.⁹⁴ In the verses 4.40.5 and 9.108.9

90. See J Gonda, *op cit.*, p. 130.

91. Geldner translates here "medha-sati" by *der Gewinn der Meisterschaft*, although in other places (7.66.8 and 7.91.6) he renders it by *der Gewinn des Opfers*. The literal translation, which is the latter, as Mayrhofer shows in his Etymological Sanskrit Dictionary, is to be preferred. It is only which conveys the meaning of what the ṛṣis wanted to express.

92 "sed ṛbhava yam avatha yūyam indras ca martyam/sa dhībhir astu sanitā medhasātā so arvatā."

"vi no vājā ṛbhukṣaṇaḥ pathaś citana yaṣṭave/ asmabhyam sūrayaḥ stutā viśvā āśās tariṣāni."

93. *He precedes the word that accompanies him; the bull bellows in the wood towards the holy seat, he, the true sacrifice.*

"pra yujo vāco agriyo vṛṣāva cakradad vana/ sadmābhi satyo adhvaraḥ."

94. *I am Agni, by birth the knower of all creatures. My name is oblation.*

"agnir asmi janmanā jātavedā.../... havir asmi nāma."

Agni and Soma are respectively called born of ṛta on one side and the very ṛta on the other⁹⁵. In 10.100.5 the sacrifice is identified with Manu,⁹⁶ etc.

It could be that in some of the passages in which gods or men are celebrated as the cause of all one had to understand implicitly under their names the sacrifice. But this is not necessarily the case, since, as we have seen, creation can also be attributed to gods and men, by the mere fact of their being sacrificers.

From all we have said it comes out clearly that there are various ways in which creation can be attributed to gods and men in the Vedic context without impugning the supremacy of ṛta/yajña. And yet that which appears clearly after an elaborate study of the Veda is far from being evident at first sight, otherwise a thesis like cathenotheism, for example, would have never been formulated. There is certainly a sort of discrepancy between what the Veda says in the surface and what it says when more deeply analyzed. That is not surprising, if, as we think, the Veda represents a re-interpretation of the former tradition without rejecting it. In our opinion the compilers of the Saṁhitā offer a choice of interpretations regarding the matter of creation, in the sense that in spite of proposing a definite doctrine they do not want to reject previous conceptions. One could take as an indication of this the fact that sometimes in the same hymn a verse attributes creation to a god by virtue of his priestly character or his priestly action whereas another attributes it to him without mentioning either of the two things. A very remarkable

95. (*Agni*), the swan that sits in the bright (heaven), the god who sits in the mid-air, the hotṛ who sits on the altar, the born of ṛta, the ṛta itself.

“hamsaḥ śuciṣad vasur antarikṣasaddhotā vediṣad .../... ṛtajā... ṛtam.”

(Press out) the steer with thousand streams, who increases through the milk and is dear to the divine race; he who born of ṛta has grown mighty through the ṛta : the kṛg, the god, the great ṛta.

“sahasradhāraṁ vṛṣabhaṁ payovṛdham priyaṁ devāya janma-
ne/ṛtena ya ṛtajāto vi vaṛdhe rājā deva ṛtaṁ bṛhat.”

96. The sacrifice is Manu, our father.

“...yajño manuḥ...naḥ pitā hi kam...”

example of this is found in the verses 3 and 4 of the hymn 4.42, which celebrate the glory of Varuṇa. Let us quote them :

I Varuṇa am Indra. These two regions, wide in their greatness, deep and beneficial, I have created knowing like Tvaṣṭṛ all beings. I maintain the two world halves.

While this verse does not mention any particular relation between Varuṇa's creation and the sacrificial order—something which in view of certain Iranian parallels seems to agree very much with the original physiognomy of Varuṇa—the next one states the relationship in the most emphatic terms. It says :

I made to flow the waters that give freely. I set the sky firm in the seat of ṛta. The Son of Aditi, endowed with ṛta's nature (ṛtāvā), has extended thrice the earth with the help of ṛta⁹⁷.

That which occurs sometimes in a single hymn occurs of course more often in separate hymns, so that the choice of opinions no doubt becomes easier. But that does not prove that the ṛsis had no conception of their own. The free choice which they offer is rather a proof of the contrary and the mythical image of the world they had certainly in mind is incompatible with any fundamental doubt regarding the question of the first principle of the world.

When one compares the Vedic conception of the sacrifice with its Zoroastrian counterpart one wonders at the difference of outlook. For while the Vedic "yajña" appears at the same time as creator and redeemer (about this point we will speak later), the Zoroastrian "yasna" refers almost exclusively to the Iranian concept of redemption. As a matter of fact in the Zoroastrian context the sacrifice is fundamentally an act of war that helps God in his fight against the evil creation. It looks somehow as if the original unity which we can see in the Vedic sacrifice had split into two while penetrating into the theological ambit of Zoroastrianism, since whereas the

97. "aham indro varuṇas te mahitvorvī gabhīre rājani sumake/tvaṣṭeva viśvā bhuvanāni vidvānt saṁ airayaṁ rodāsī dhārayaṁ ca."

"aham apo apinvaṁ ukṣamāṇā dhārayaṁ divaṁ sadana ṛtasya/ ṛtena putro aditer ṛtāvota tridhātu prathayad vi bhūma."

redemptive aspect of the sacrifice is fully acknowledged there, its creative aspect on the contrary is not only silenced but in a way anathematized. In fact what in the perspective of the Śruti is the creative sacrifice, namely, the immolation of Puruṣa/Prajāpati, or of the cosmic Horse, in the Zoroastrian context becomes a sacrifice performed by Ahriman, the Evil Spirit. For we are told that it was Ahriman and not God who immolated the cosmic Bull, called *the lone-created Bull* in Pahlavi texts, and that "when the Bull expired, its brain and other organs were scattered over the ground and fertilized it, and from its severed members every kind of grain and healing plant sprang up, while from its blood the vine arose *from which wine is made*. Its seed was carried up to the moon where it was purified, and from this purified seed cattle and all the different species of animals were created—apart from the "wolf-species", which also includes the entire cat tribe, for these were (directly) created by Ahriman."⁹⁸ To ascribe the creative immolation of the Cosmic Bull not to God but to the Evil Spirit implies certainly an anathema against the pre-Zoroastrian conception of the creative sacrifice. It cannot be denied that the creative immolation of *the lone-created Bull* contrasts beyond measure with the redemptive immolation of *the Bull Hadhayans* at the end of time, which is prefigured by every Zoroastrian sacrifice. While the former is clearly anathematized, the eschatological importance of the latter is thrown into relief by saying that it will have the entire world as altar and that it will be offered by the future Saviour, the posthumous son of Zoroaster, who will perform it in the presence of Ohrmazd and the Amahraspand. Its result will be the final elimination of Evil and the glorious renovation of everything, which in the Zoroastrian vision is the very aim of creation. The two sacrifices, that of Ahriman and that of the future Saviour, are celebrated with a Bull, but whereas the former that has undoubtedly a creative character is credited to the Evil Spirit, the latter having a redemptive character is considered as the model of the entire Zoroastrian liturgy up to the consummation of time. That here there has been a split of a single reality into two is clear

98. R.C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, p. 127.

from the fact that in the Mithraic mysteries, which, as Zaehner shows, have their root in the pre-Zoroastrian cult of the "daevas", the bull sacrifice performed by Mithras has at the same time a creative and redemptive sense, exactly like the Vedic sacrifice. This is not the only split of a unitary concept to be found in Zoroastrianism. A similar split has taken place in the case of Soma, Indra and Vāyu. Thus for instance Soma becomes the god Haoma on one side and the demon Zairi (the yellow one=Skr. "hari") on the other; Indra divides himself into Verethragha (=Skr. "vr̥trahan") and the demon Indra; Vāyu splits into the Vāyu of the Holy Spirit and the Vāyu of the Evil Spirit, who has very much in common with the demon of death.⁹⁹

This sort of splits represents evidently the partial acceptance and the partial rejection of a concept: in the concrete case of the sacrifice the canonisation of its redemptive aspect and the anathematizing of its creative aspect, the reasons for which are rather abstruse.

When one bears in mind the predominantly redemptive character of the Zoroastrian "yasna", one is surprised at finding in some sections of the Pahlavi literature an increasing emphasis on the creative character of the sacrifice. "It is by a sacrifice"—comments Marian Molé—"that the Holy Spirit creates the world, causes Gayōmart and Zoroaster to be born and causes the latter to accept his religion."¹⁰⁰ About all this the gāthās of Zarathushtra do not say a word. A noticeable change of perspective like that is not merely due to the evolution of the ideas, but it shows the assimilation of foreign influences, among others Indian. As it is known from historical sources this osmotic process reached its culminating point during the reign of Shāpūr the First. There is not the slightest doubt, for instance, that the Zurvanite myth of the birth of Ohrmazd as a result of a sacrifice celebrated by Zurvan during thousand years is of Indian origin, as Zaehner also points out.¹⁰¹

99. R.C. Zaehner, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

100. See Sources Orientales, *La Naissance du Monde*, p. 303.

101. R.C. Zaehner, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

Whatever it is, this change of perspective represents a return to a fundamental religious conception, if, as Vorbichler says, "every true sacrifice is essentially a celebration and representation of the creative act, both in the sense of a commemoration and a re-enactment, which is destined to give further life to the creation on the part of God."¹⁰²

The difference of outlook between the Indian and Iranian conceptions of the sacrifice is a further proof of what Warnach says, to wit, that the sacrifice "is such a polymorphic and many-layered phenomenon, that it almost looks blasphemous to try to grasp it in clear-out categories"¹⁰³.

To conceive the sacrifice as the supreme principle is not, as it has been said¹⁰⁴, some sort of apotheosis of the ritualism, but the result of a revelation of transcendental importance, culminating a long religious past centered around a cult which was a constant object of devout contemplation on one side¹⁰⁵ and reflection and even speculation¹⁰⁶ on the other. It was in this intensely religious atmosphere that the ṛṣis discovered first of all the creative and redemptive dimension of the liturgy, and finally its character of first principle. This is, I believe, the sense of the extraordinary verse 10.181.2.

102. A. Vorbichler, *Das Opfer*, p. 96.

103. *Opfer Christi und Opfer der Kirche*, p. 30.

104. "The religious means of the sacrifice becomes an end in itself, a semi-deified idol or better an impersonal force, magical and atheistic—and this to such an extent that the philosophical school of the Vedic ritual sacrifice (pūrva-mīmāṃsā) is officially atheistic—an extraordinary paradox indeed." See A. Esteller, *The Quest for the original Rg Veda*. Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. 1959. Vol. 50, p. 91.

105. See *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3. 5. 3, 12 : *The great inspirer of devotion, truly, is the sacrifice.*

106. "L'importance attachée à la forme matérielle du sacrifice avait fait des connaissances nécessaires au sacrificateur une science véritable, bien avant que cette science comprit les raffinements philosophiques ou théologiques auxquels semblent faire allusion les vers 1. 161. 39, 6. 58. 1 et beaucoup d'autres "

See A. Bergagnic, *op. cit.*, vol I, p. 125.

*They discovered what had been out of their reach (yad atihitam āsīt) : the supreme abode of the sacrifice, which is invisible (yajñasya dhāma paramaṁ guhā yat).*¹⁰⁷

This text enables us to guess that the doctrine it promulgates about the absolute supremacy of the sacrifice had a certain character of innovation in the eyes of the ṛṣi who composed the stanza. In compliance with his words it looks as if the doctrine about a supreme abode, form or essence of the sacrifice was not a strictly traditional one, since he speaks of this vision as a discovery of something which had effectively been hidden up to then. If the difference between the new and the old vision corresponds somehow to the distinction often found in the texts between the present and the past seers and between the present gods and the past ones, meaning perhaps the gods worshipped in times of old, a possibility which cannot be a priori discarded, then all we have said about the re-interpretation of the pre-Vedic tradition on the part of the ṛṣis acquires a special relief, for in this case one could be sure that the Vedic poets did not only re-interpret the old doctrine, but also that they were perfectly conscious of their reinterpretation.

The discovery of the secret abode, form and essence (dhāma) of the sacrifice, which had been veiled up to then is parallel and intrinsically related to the discovery of the cosmic dimension of the liturgical formula, the brahman, which gives rise to the Upaniṣadic speculation about Brahman. Here also the ardent contemplation of the Vedic seers led them to the sudden intuition of the entirely transcendental character of the sacred word, which not only has, like the sacrifice, its navel in the waters, in the sea, from where it spreads out through the whole universe¹⁰⁸, but it ultimately coincides with the supreme sea, which, as 10.5.1 says, speaks from the heart.

107. "avindan te atihitam yad āsīt yajñasya dhāma paramaṁ guhā yat..."

In my opinion this first part of the stanza has to end with a full stop, without being correlated to the second part. That is also Bergaigne's interpretation as against Geldner's.

108. See 10. 125. 7.

This is what is indicated by the words of 1.164.39, when it says that the gods rest in the highest heaven of the word and that it would be of little avail to recite the ṛks without knowing their supreme source.

It is only starting from these intuitions, which somehow can be felt as present throughout the entire Ṛg Veda, that properly speaking the Vedic religion begins, in which the role that God plays in other religions is discharged by ṛta or yajña, the cultual work, as the following text literally says: "the adorable yajña is the closest of realities and the first of all divinities."¹⁰⁹

As it is known this doctrine finds a clear formulation from the time of the *Yajur Veda* onwards, when the sacrifice (yajus) is understood as the actual God.

If everywhere the sacrifice is the central act of religion, as Furlani says, in the Vedas it becomes besides its very goal. In this sense one could name the Vedic Indians *the people of the sacrifice* just as the Bible calls the tribes of Jacob *the people of Yahwe*.

109. This text appears in the commentary of Sāyaṇa to verse 1. 105. 4 which he interprets in the following sense:

I ask to the yajña, the closest of all realities, the messenger must tell me it: where is the previous ṛta gone?, who possesses it now?

"yajñam prcchāmy avamam sa tad dūto vi vocati/ kva ṛtam pūrvyam gatam kas tad bibharti nutano..."

The commentary runs: "The adorable yajña is the closest of realities and the first of all divinities. To that Agni (referred here as yajña) I ask, on account of the Śruti saying *Agni is the head, the first of the deities*, and on account of the Brāhmaṇa saying *Agni is the closest to us of the gods...*"

CHAPTER II

THE SACRIFICE OF THE GODS

Before speaking of the sacrifice of the gods it will be good to specify further the relationships of the gods to the sacrifice, infinitely more important in the Vedic perspective than the relationships the gods may have with the phenomena of nature, etc. A characterization of the gods as powers that act behind the natural phenomena, which might be sufficient to describe the gods of other traditions, is totally inadequate to show the nature of the Vedic gods, who cannot be really understood apart from their relationship to the order of *ṛta*/*yajña*, as Bergaigne was one of the first to point out.

We have already seen in the previous chapter the dependance of the gods on that order at the level of acting. There is no need therefore to emphasize it again. Let us now confine ourselves to their dependance on *ṛta*/*yajña* in regard to their being.

One of the most plastic ways in which the Vedas throw this point into relief is by speaking of the gods as being born and growing up in the bosom of *ṛta*. Let us therefore comment on these two Vedic images, which are of considerable doctrinal importance.

Numerous are the texts depicting the Vedic gods as born of *ṛta*. Agni, concretely, is called so about eleven times, Soma and the Maruts twice, the *Ādityas*, *Bṛhaspati*, *Viṣṇu* and possibly *Indra* once.¹ There is no need to give here all the ref-

1. It is doubtful whether the expression "*ṛtasya prajāṃ*", which occurs in 8. 6. 2, refers to *Indra* or to the "*dhīh*". *Sāyaṇa* takes it to mean *Indra* whereas *Geldner* or *Lüders* think that it refers to the "*dhīh*". Whatever it is, the syntactic link between this stanza and the following one makes *Sāyaṇa*'s interpretation perfectly possible. It is also possible that the epithet "*satyayoni*" which *Indra* receives in verse 4. 19. 2 may have a similar meaning, namely, the divine generation of *Indra* from the Truth. However, the sense of "*satyayoni*" being an *hapax legomenon* is difficult to ascertain.

erences, which can be easily found in Grassmann's Wörterbuch under the following significant expressions: "ṛtajāta", "ṛtajā", "ṛtaprajāta", "ṛtasya garbha", "ṛtapravīta", "prathamajā ṛtasya", "ṛtasya prajā".

Bearing in mind the Vedic image of the world to which reference has already been made and which will be studied in more detail in chapter V it would not be prudent to discard *a priori* the possibility of having to refer ultimately to ṛta all the divine births mentioned in the Veda, without excluding those which attribute the divine paternity to various gods or even to men, whatever explanation one might have to give of each of them in particular. We will see later some general ways in which the question can be envisaged.

Not only the gods are born of ṛta, but they grow and nourish themselves by means of ṛta. The instrumentality of ṛta regarding the growth of the gods is thrown into relief by the frequent use of the adjective "ṛtā-vṛdh" in the Veda in connection with the gods. This adjective, which, as Lüders has shown², means exclusively *growing through the ṛta*, is applied not less than twenty-five times to different gods. The same idea is conveyed in different words elsewhere. Let us quote some passages :—

5.21.4 *Let mortal man adore your god, Agni, in the ritual way (devayajyayā). Shine forth enkindled, o Radiant one. You have taken seat in the bosom of ṛta, you have taken seat in the chamber of the food*³

4 7.7 *When the gods deprived of food enjoy themselves in that udder : the abode of ṛta, then may the great Agni, to whom oblation is brought with homage, approach the sacrifice, endowed as he is always with the nature of ṛta (sadam id ṛtāvā).*⁴

2.34.13 *They, the Rudras, grew in the abodes of ṛta through the streams, like through red ointments.*⁵

2. H. Lüders, *Varuṇa*. p. 555 ss.

3. "devaṁ vo devayajyayāgnim ilīta martyaḥ/ samiddhaḥ śukra didiḥ ṛtasya yonim āsadaḥ sasasya yonim āsadaḥ."

4. "sasasya yad viyutā sasminn ūdhann ṛtasya dhāman raṇayanta devāḥ/ mahāṁ agnir namasā rātaḥavyo ver adhvarāya sadam id ṛtāvā."

5. "te kṣoṇibhir aruṇebhir nāñjibhī rudrā ṛtasya sadaneṣu vavṛdhuḥ."

7.60.5 *These sons of Aditi, the mighty, the infallible, have grown up in the house of ṛta.*⁶

The existential dependance of the gods on the sacrificial order to which we are referring finds adequate expression in the words of 11.35.1 addressed to the Ādityas :

“ṛtenādityās tiṣṭhanti”

The Ādityas subsist by virtue of ṛta

This substantiation is particularly interesting, since, as it is known, the Ādityas belonged originally to the Asura group, which does not seem to have had from the beginning the same relationship as the proper devas have with the sacrificial order. Here, however, as well as in the last quotation, they are completely assimilated to the devas as far as their existential dependance on ṛta is concerned. This can be taken as an exponent of the ideological transformation that has taken place in the Veda, a point with which we will have to busy ourselves in more detail later.

Apart from this existential relationship one asks oneself whether there is any sort of deeper relationship between the gods and the order of ṛta. How to interpret, for instance, a word like “ṛtāvant”, so often applied to the gods ? Does it merely mean *associated to ṛta* or can it be also translated by *endowed with the nature of ṛta, intrinsically belonging to the order of ṛta* ?—The first thing to the borne in mind in regard to this point is that the relationship of the gods with ṛta is an acquired relationship and not an original one. The Truth or ṛta which the Śruti presents to us as a constant patrimony of the gods⁷ was not always their possession. “As children of Prajāpati, the gods and asuras shared the patrimony of the father which was Vāc : they then indifferently spoke truth and falsehood.”⁸ This is presumably the period when the gods could not be distinguished either among themselves or distinguished from the Asuras ; the time in which Agni was without lustre, Indra without strength and Sūrya without light⁹, the time in which

6. “...ima ṛtasya vāvṛdhur durōṇe śagmāsaḥ putrā aditer adabdhāḥ.”

7. See *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 1. 6, *Kauṣītiki Brāhmaṇa* 2. 8, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3. 4. 2. 8.

8. A.B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, vol. II, p. 471. See *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 9. 5. 1. 12.

9. See *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 4. 5. 4. 1-5.

the very Prajāpati was unable to distinguish between devas and asuras.¹⁰ At that time all the gods were equally good as *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 4.5.4.1 says¹¹, but not with the goodness that derives from the total surrender to the order of the truth, of the sacrifice, but with a goodness of a merely natural order, which counts as little to the Veda as the natural goodness of Adam and Eve at the moment of their creation counts in the Christian theology.

This state of affairs ends however when the gods take the side of the Truth and accept to be converted by Prajāpati into stalks of Soma, or in other words, to be immolated for the sake of creation¹², while the asuras remain attached to their possessions and thus make themselves solidary with the Lie in the Vedic sense of the word. From that moment onwards *the gods spake nothing but truth and the Asuras nothing but Untruth*¹³. From that moment onwards the Truth is the constant law of the gods, as *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.4.2.8 says, and it is through it that *their conquest, their glory, is unassailable*.

Understanding the gods as illumined, immortal beings, who accomplish the cosmic functions in compliance with the supreme law of the sacrifice, there is no doubt that one can interpret the term “*ṛtāvant*”, addressed to the gods, as meaning not only *associated with ṛta* but also *endowed with the nature of ṛta, essentially belonging to the order of ṛta*. But the term *deva*, not providing an exception to the rule, is not confined to a single meaning in the Veda. As a matter of fact in more than one passage *deva* means an entity which resembles rather an asura or a *vṛtra* than a *deva* proper. With reference to this Bergaigne says the following :

“It does not seem doubtful that the devas, in as much as they (occasionally) form a group opposed to the warrior god

10. *The devas, and the asuras, both of them, sprang from Prajāpati. He could not distinguish them sufficiently in order to see : here are the ones, here are the others. He then made the gods stalks of soma ! See Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa* 1. 4. 1. 1.

11. *Now, at first the gods were all alike, all good...*

12. *He then made the gods stalks of Soma ! See Taitthirīya Brāhmaṇa.* 1. 4. 1. 1.

13. See *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 9. 5. 1, 16.

Indra (4.30.5, 10.49.11), have been conceived as avaricious guards of the celestial treasures.... We have just seen the devas standing in opposition to the rising of the sun (4.30.4). We have seen them above, in a passage otherwise unrelated to Indra, retaining the waters (10.98.6). Under these circumstances they do not distinguish themselves from the asuras, to whom they were later opposed...Nevertheless, the idea of an equivocal character..., according to all appearances attached from the beginning to the name asura, does not seem to pertain to the word deva, except accidentally, and that only, on account of the very generality of the term, indifferently applied to all the gods."¹⁴

It is evident that the essential association of the Vedic gods to the sacrificial order refers exclusively to the devas in the strict sense and not to those who partake of the nature of the asura/rakṣas. The most one can say of the latter is that they are capable of passing to the order of ṛta, not without being first struck down and pierced by the vajra of Indra, or at least not without consenting to open themselves for fear of it. In this context the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3.4.3.13, 3.9.4.2, 4.1.3.1-10) speaks of the conversion of Vṛtra into Soma, or of the cession that Vṛtra makes to Indra of the most precious things in the Vedic conception for fear of his varja (5.5.5.1-6).

As for the gods in the strict sense of the word all of them belong essentially to the order of ṛta. One can say of them what is said of Agni, their head and meeting point, to wit, that their very essence is ṛta¹⁵ *Composed of truth* is the predicate that the *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* (2.8) gives to them.

It is because they are endowed with the nature of ṛta that the gods act in accordance with ṛta, that is to say, sacrifice, let pass through them the inexhaustible current of spiritual and material riches which comes down from the supreme plane, instead of tending to obstruct it as the powers of "anṛta" do, the "adevas", those who do not want to sacrifice (ayajñā...).

14. A. Bergaigne *La Religion Védique*, vol III, pp. 78-79.

15. See 5. 44. 2. *Your very essence is in ṛta.* "ṛta āsa nāma te"

It is on account of all these connotations that one has to conceive the gods as powers of *ṛta* or *yajña*. In that sense the designation "*ṛtasyaśardhāḥ*", *hosts of ṛta*, which the Maruts receive in 8.7.21 can be considered as really typical of all the gods.

From the idea which can be considered original of the gods as powers which act behind the phenomena of nature one passes in the Veda to the idea of the gods as powers of *ṛta/yajña*, whose intrinsic relation to the sacrificial order can hardly be thrown into relief better than by the use of the epithet "*devavyacastamaḥ*" which the sacrifice receives and which literally means *that which contains per excellence all the gods*.¹⁶

A careful examination would reveal that there is a close similitude between the relation of the gods with *ṛta/yajña* in the *Ṛg Veda* and their relation with *ātmā/brhma* in the Upaniṣads.

"In the Upaniṣads", say Deussen, "all the ancient Vedic gods are created by *ātman* and dependent on him. From *ātman* proceed, like sparks from the fire, all worlds, all living beings and no less the gods (*Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.1.10); on him all the gods depend (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 4.8); by him they were created as the guardians of the universe (*Aitareya Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.1.3)...It is further related how *ātman* created the divine Kṣatriyas (Indra, Varuṇa, Soma, etc), Vaiśyas (the Vasus, Rudras, Ādityas) and Śūdras (Pūṣan)...The dependence of all these nature-gods on Brahman is described in the myth of *Kena Upaniṣad* 14-18:—Agni is unable to burn a blade of grass, Vāyu is unable to blow away a wisp of straw, apart from the will of Brahman, which is effective in all the gods..."¹⁷

Just as in the Upaniṣads the gods spring forth from "*ātmā/brhma*" and depend completely on it, in the *Ṛg Veda* they spring forth from "*ṛta/yajña*" and depend completely on

16. See 5. 22. 2 *Appoint Agni Jātavedas as divine sacrificer. Let the sacrifice that comprises all the gods (devavyacastamaḥ) proceed today in due order.*

"ny agniṁ jātavedasaṁ dadhāta devam ṛvijam/ pra yajña etv ānuṣag adyā devavyacastamaḥ."

17. P. Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads*, p. 172 ss.

it, at the level of being as well as at the level of acting. And just as in the Upaniṣads individual gods appear occasionally as symbolical representatives of the ātman, as for example Indra in *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.5.12, *Aitareya Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.3.14, *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad* 2.6.3.1, Varuṇa in *Taittirīyaka Upaniṣad* 3.1, or Prajāpati in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.7f, in the same way particular gods appear as designations for ṛta or yajña in the *R̥g Veda*, as we have seen.

Leaving out here the question concerning the relationship of the Vedic ṛta/yajña with the Upaniṣadic ātmā/brahma, it is evident that both concepts can at least be homologated. By this we mean to say that the role that one concept plays in one system is homologous to the role that the other concept plays in the other system. Although the notion of homology is primarily a geometrical one, it is more and more utilized in the field of comparative religions and cultural concepts, since it has the enormous advantage of avoiding overhurried syntheses and parallelisms. The geometrical homology speaks just of correlations between points of two different systems, without implying that they can be interchanged or transplanted from one system to the other. They simply correspond to each other. It is not our intention to affirm that the concepts of ṛta and brahman are merely homologous, but that they are at least homologable. About more intimate connections between them we will speak later.

If one has to recognize monotheism by the acceptance of a supreme principle from which everything depends in all aspects, then we must say that this stage is already obtained in the *R̥g Veda* with the concept of the all-overpowering ṛta, for instance, and this monotheism, as it is the case with the Upaniṣads also¹⁸, has not been developed from polytheism but from entirely different premisses.¹⁹

It is interesting to notice in this connection that the Supreme is not even called "deva" (apart from exceptions) in

18. See P. Deussen *op. cit.*, p. 175.

19. Not like the monotheism of Xenophanes, for instance, which clearly derives from polytheism and consists merely in the fact of subordinating all gods and men to one main god: "eis theòs en te theoîsi kai anthrôpoisi mégistos."

the Upaniṣads but "ātmā", "brahma", "īśvara"... , and similarly the supreme principle is not called *divinity* (apart from exceptions)²⁰ in the *Rg Veda*, but "ṛta", "yajña", the waters....

In view of all this I do not think it is correct to speak, as it is normally done, of the attainment of an incipient monotheism at the end only of the Vedic period.

Fortunately a certain reaction has already started against this way of thinking, which, far from being based on real facts, is rather dependent on the intellectual fashion to apply everywhere evolutionistic schemes. Here are some words of J. Gonda which indicate a noticeable change of attitude, even though not consistently followed by the author :

"The rectilineal development of religion proceeding in an orderly sequence from animism through polytheism to monotheism, which was in the last decades of the XIXth century adopted by many scholars has since then proved untenable."²¹

As far as the Vedic problem is concerned I feel inclined to think with Ananda Coomaraswamy that "in reality, the notion of progress or decline is out of place, an absolute progress or decline being no more conceivable in metaphysics than in art."²²

Having specified in bold strokes the relationship of the gods to the sacrifice it is time to speak of the gods' sacrifice.

In the previous chapter we have seen this sacrifice of the gods taking place within the bosom of the waters, covered and protected by the supreme ṛta. Between the one and the other there is perfect continuity, a continuity resembling that of a seed developing itself and which could perhaps be interpreted in a Buddhist sense as absence both of identity and difference : "connectedness by continuity denies identity and otherness"

20. An interesting exception is found in our opinion in verse 1. 68. 4 : *They divided among themselves the divinity, namely, ṛta, worshipping the immortal world as usual.*

"bhajanta viśve devatvaṁ nāma ṛtaṁ sapanto amṛtam evaiḥ,"

21. J. Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Philosophy*, p. 131.

22. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *A new approach to the Vedas*, p. 53.

says one of the ancient authorities (porāṇā) quoted by Buddhaghosa.²³ The continuity between the supreme sacrifice and that of the gods expresses itself in the Veda by means of two suggestive images taken from the art of weaving and from the art of driving chariots.

In the art of weaving one thing is the thread and another is the weft. If we are to believe the Veda, the relationship that exists between them is analogous to the relationship that exists between the celestial and supreme sacrifices, as it is evident from the words of 10.130.1 previously quoted :

*The sacrifice, which is extended in all directions by means of its threads, that weave these fathers. They sit in front of the weft and say : "Weave, unweave !"*²⁴

The texture of the celestial sacrifice would be impossible, without the existence of the threads of the supreme sacrifice, which pervade everything.

More vivid, perhaps, is the idea in 1.164.5. It says :

*Under the rule of the grown up calf the seven seers have spread out the threads in order to weave.*²⁵

By the grown up calf I understand the supreme ṛta named also cow in other places (4.3.9, 3.55.13) for it nourishes with its milk everything, under whose rule the seven seers or ṛṣis weave continuously the web of the celestial sacrifice.

From the art of driving chariots the Vedic Aryans took the idea of ṛta or yajña as a chariot that majestically circulates through the universe, transporting all sorts of goods. It is a single chariot that circulates, but at intervals the drivers vary : first they are gods, later men (10.130.7) and again the gods, in the phase of the return of the sacrifice to its starting point. Looked at from this angle the gods' sacrifice is not a new sacrifice, but just the leading of the supreme sacrifice in a particular direction : creative or destructive, upwards or downwards. In a sense the celestial sacrifice reduces itself to the fact

23. See Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhimagga*, ch. 17, nn. 165-170.

24. "yo yajño viśvatas tantubhis tata...ime vayanti pitaro...pra vayāpa vayety āsate tate."

25. "...vatse baṣkaye' dhi sapta tantūn vi tatnīre kavaya otavā u."

of taking the reins of the chariot of the cosmic *ṛta* and driving it. The vedic image of the gods as charioteers of the vast *ṛta*, which has to be identified with the supreme *ṛta*, is therefore another image that indicates the connectedness by continuity that exists between the supreme sacrifice and the heavenly one.

*For you are, O Agni, the charioteer of the noble wisdom, of the good dexterity, of the vast ṛta.*²⁶

*The charioteer of the vast ṛta, the vigorous Agni, became the purohita of the gods.*²⁷

We are not alone in taking “*ṛtaṁ bṛhat*” as the supreme *ṛta*; Lüders also seems to understand it in the same way. According to him the epithets “*mahā*”, “*bṛhat*”, and also “*cāru*” are all characteristic of the cosmic *ṛta*,²⁸ which he implicitly distinguishes both from the *ṛta* of the gods and that of men.

Just as in the descending phase of the sacrifice the gods are the drivers of the highest *ṛta*, in the same way in the ascending phase or the phase of return they are the drivers of the earthly sacrifice. In this sense, an expression such as *charioteer of the vast ṛta* finds a kind of complement in expressions such as *charioteer of the sacrifices*, etc., addressed sometimes to the gods in their capacity as leaders of the earthly cultual work. See a couple of examples :

6.55.1 *Come ! Let us get together, O bright Son of Deliverance ! Be the charioteer of our ṛta.*²⁹

8.11.2 *You must be glorified in our gatherings, O mighty Agni, you the charioteer of the sacrifices.*³⁰

The Vedic image of the gods as charioteers of the vast *ṛta* is one that is particularly apt to convey the idea of a continuity between the sacrifice of the gods and the supreme one.

26. See 4.10.2 : “*adhā hy agne krator bhadrasya dakṣasya sādhoḥ / rathīr ṛtasya bṛhato babhūha*”

27. See 3.2.8 “*...rathīr ṛtasya bṛhato vicarṣaṇīr agnir devānām abhavat purohitaḥ*”

28. See H. Lüders, *op. cit.*, pp. 580 and 602.

29. “*chi vām vimuco napād āghṛṇe saṁ sacāvahai / rathīr ṛtasya no bhava.*”

30. “*tvam asi praśasyo vidatheṣu saṁhantya / agne rathīr adhvarāṇām.*”

It is not our intention to touch on all the points concerning the sacrifice of the gods here. We just want to call the attention to the main two, namely, the cosmic import of the gods' sacrifice on one side and its liturgical import on the other.

The creative aspect of the gods' sacrifice is especially made evident in the "Puruṣa-sūkta" of the *R̥g Veda* where is explained in detail how the various things came to be *when the gods performed (literally extended) the sacrifice with Puruṣa as victim*.³¹ This sacrifice has as its theatre the whole universe (10.90.2-4) and from it have been born all the things.

Although the idea of a creative immolation appears in innumerable contexts it is not apparent to what extent it is legitimate to speak of it *per modum unius* as it is generally done.³² To me it is not immaterial whether the creative immolation is of a sea monster or of a divine reality, whether it is acquiesced in or forced, whether it is accomplished by God or by the Devil, as in the case of the immolation of the lone-created Bull, narrated in the Pahlavi texts. But these differences do not seem to impress the majority of mythologists who are eager to establish general patterns after having reviewed a more or less considerable number of parallels. To all appearances the laws of homology have scarce value in the eyes of most mythologists, who do not feel any scruples in untying the mythical elements from their context and indulging in easy comparisons. The fact that the Greek and the Biblical myths may equally derive from the preceding bronze-age civilisation of Mesopotamia, does not exempt us from establishing qualitative differences between them or between the myths of the bronze-age civilisation and those of the subsequent era. To me the myth of Puruṣa / Prajāpati is qualitatively different from more or less similar myths that are found in the mythologies of the Pacific Islands or of China or in the Germanic tradition, which lack the complex of relations that the Indian myth has with the entire Vedic doctrine of the sacrifice and with the Upaniṣadic conception

31. "yat puruṣeṇa haviṣā devā yajñam atanvata" (10.90.6)

32. See Sources Orientales, *La naissance du monde*, pp. 481-487.

of ātmā/brahma. Taken in its totality the myth of Puruṣa/Prajāpati is not unworthy of the Christian conception of the redemptive incarnation of the Logos by means of the "kenosis", leaving out the question whether they can be homologated or not.

Besides the "Puruṣa-sūkta" other passages also describe in a less dramatic way the cosmic import of the gods' sacrifice. Among them are particularly pertinent those which present the gods as creating and governing the world by means of ṛta. By ṛta one can understand here both the gods' sacrifice and the supreme one with the help of which the gods perform their cultural action, as we saw in the last chapter.

Here are some relevant passages :

5.1.7 *Him³³ who spread out both worlds by means of ṛta they balm with ghee as their own racer.*³⁴

4.42.4 *The son of Aditi,³⁵ endowed with ṛta's nature, has extended threefold the earth by means of ṛta.*³⁶

5.63.7 *By means of ṛta you both (Mitra and Varuṇa) govern all the world.*³⁷

6.39.3-4 *This Indu has lighted the darksome nights, O Indra, at morning and at evening, along the years. Him have they established as the landmark of the days. He made the dawns to be born in splendour.*

*This has illumined resplendent the sombre (worlds). This has caused to shine the numerous (dawns), by means of ṛta.*³⁸

The same exploits are attributed to the Aṅgiras in verse 10.62.3, who as celestial sacrificers do not fundamentally differ from the gods :

*May you have a good progeny, O Aṅgiras, you who by means of ṛta raised the sun to heaven and spread forth the mother earth.*³⁹

33. Agni.

34. "...ā yas tatāna rodasī ṛtena nityam mṛjanti vājinaṁ gṛṇtena."

35. Varuṇa.

36. "...ṛtena putro aditer ṛtāvota tridhātu prathayad vi bhūma."

37. "...ṛtena viśvaṁ bhuvanaṁ vi rājatha..."

38. "ayaṁ dyotayad adyuto vy aktūn doṣā vastoh śarada indur indra/ imaṁ ketum adadhur nū cid ahaṇāṁ śuci-janmana uṣasāś cakāra."
"ayaṁ rociyad aruco rucāno yaṁ vāsayad vy ṛtena pūrvih..."

39. "ya ṛtena sūryam ārohan divy aprathayan prthivīm mātaraṁ vi/ suprajāstvam aṅgiras vo astu..."

The austere and almost theologically precise language of these passages contrasts with the poetical and picturesque language of other passages, like 10.88.8-9 :

First the gods engendered the recitation of the hymn, then Agni, then the oblation. This was their sacrifice that guards the body. This the heavens know, this the earth, this the waters.

*Agni, raising up, heated with his glow the earth and this heaven in his grandeur, he whom the gods engendered and in whom they offered up all beings.*⁴⁰

The *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (25.9.2, 25.18.1-2) as if echoing these words of the *R̥g Veda* tells us that it was in fact by means of this session (*sattra*) that Agni came into the state of setting all things in motion (*sarvasya prāsravaṇam agacchat*), or alternatively, that it is by means of this thousand years' session that the All-Emanators ("viśvasrjaḥ" i.e. all the powers participating in the act of creation) emanated all the universe (*viśvam asrjanta*).

Apart from its cosmic significance the sacrifice of the gods has, as pointed out, a liturgical import. Concerning this point the first thing which strikes our attention is the character of model, prototype or exemplary cause, which the celestial liturgy is supposed to have in respect of the earthly sacrifice. Everything in the vision of the ṛṣis has its model in the celestial plane⁴¹, without excluding the sacrificial order on earth.

To translate "āroḥayan" and "aprathayan" by the second person gives a better meaning.

40. "sūktavākam̐ prathamam̐ ād id agnim̐ ād iddhavir̐ ajayanta devāḥ/ sa eṣām̐ yajño abhavat tanūpās tam̐ dyaur̐ veda tam̐ pṛthivī tam̐ āpaḥ."

"yam̐ devāso' janayantāgnim̐ yasminn̐ ājuhavir̐ bhuvanāni viśvā/so arcīṣa pṛthivīm̐ dyām̐ utemām̐ ṛjūyamāno atapan mahitvā."

41. "Signalons d'abord comme applications du principe essentiel de l'assimilation du terrestre au celeste...quelques faits qui ne rentreraient exactement dans aucune de nos subdivisions...Le mariage terrestre est dans l'hymne 10. 85, particulièrement aux vers 36 et 38, assimilé au mariage celeste de Sūrya et de Soma. Je reserve pour la deuxième partie les textes qui nous montreront dans les combats du ciel, les prototypes des combats de la terre. Mais je citerai encore les vers 4. 57. 5-8 d'après lesquels la charrue, le sillon, tout ce qui concerne le labourage, semble avoir son modèle dans le ciel.

See A. Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique*, vol I, pp. 122-123.

which besides is only acceptable inasmuch as it follows the heavenly model, since, as the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3.3.4.30) says, *inauspicious for the sacrifice is that which is human*.

From the standpoint of the Śruti "the whole ritual may be regarded as *mysterium et mimus*", as Ananda Coomaraswamy has pointed out.⁴²

Among the Vedic texts which throw this point into relief have to be reckoned in the first place 10.130.3&6. and 10.67.2. Let us quote them again :

What was the measure and the model, what was the basis... when all the gods sacrificed the (first) god ?

To it conformed themselves the human ṛsis, our parents, when the sacrifice was born in times of old.

*While they were praising ṛta and rightly praying, the Aṅgiras, the sons of heaven, the heroes of the Asura, devised the first form of the sacrifice, establishing the path of wisdom.*⁴³

In Zoroastrianism also "the earthly sacrifice, as performed by human priests, is merely a representation of the eternal sacrifice which God Haoma offers *on the highest peak of high Harā*, where heaven and earth meet"⁴⁴. In connection with this another account says that God Haoma manifested himself to the Prophet, as the fairest of men, and begged him to immolate and to consume him in his form as plant.⁴⁵

All this is not according to appearances a particularity of the Indian and Iranian traditions, if Warnach is right when he affirms that "the sacrificial victim appears (everywhere) as the representative of the immolated divinity and the sacrificer, who explicitly or at least implicitly identifies himself with the sacrificial victim, enters into the sacrificial action of that

42. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

43. "Kāsit pramā pratimā kim nidānam.../...yad devā devam ayajanta viśve."

"cāk|pre tena ṛsayo manuṣyā yajñe jāte pitaro naḥ purāṇe..."

"ṛtaṁ śaṁsanta ṛju didhyānā divas putrāso asurasya vīrāḥ/vipraṁ padam aṅgirasō dadhānā yajñasya dhāma prathamam mananta."

44. R.C. Zachner, *Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, p. 91.

45. See R.C. Zachner, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

Primordial Happening and experiences thus in himself the fate of the dying and resurrecting God."⁴⁶

Even supposing that this statement may represent an excessive generalization, it is a fact that the mythical thought postulates everywhere celestial models for the things on earth : the earthly Qu'ran is a copy of the heavenly Qu'ran, the temple of Jerusalem is built according to a divine model, etc.

Leaving out the question of the validity of this mythical image of things, it seems opportune to remark the difference of emphasis laid in the Iranian and Indian traditions concerning the priestly character and the sacrificial action of the gods. While in the Veda these two points are constantly stressed, the Iranian tradition refers to them almost by exception. We are surely told that *Aūharmazd performed the spiritual Yazīšn ceremony with the archangels (ameshospendān) in the Rapitvin Gāh* and that *in the Yazīšn he supplied every means for overcoming the adversary*⁴⁷, but this is a rather uncommon way of speaking. The priestly character of Ahura Mazdāh and the Amesha Spentas is hardly thrown into relief in the Zoroastrian literature, even in the later-day sections of it, whereas it is the most predominant note of the Vedic gods, as predominant as their character of candidates to Buddhahood might be in the Buddhist context, which, no less than the Veda, characterizes itself by a radically new interpretation of the ancient gods.

The emphasis of the Vedas on the priestly character of the gods and their action is, as we shall see, in intimate connection with the particular developments that the doctrine of the sacrifice receives in the Veda, which in their turn are intrinsically bound to the deep transformation that the cult of the Asuras suffers during the Vedic period with all the theological changes that it brought about.

The earthly liturgy does not only follow the model of the gods' sacrifice, but it receives also from it its efficacy, just as the gods' sacrifice receives its efficiency from the supreme sacrifice.

Many are the texts which make allusion to the necessary intervention of the gods for the efficiency of the sacrificial

46. *Opfer Christi und Opfer der Kirche*, p. 39.

47. See *Bundahishn* II, 9, tr. West *SBE* V. (1880) 14.

rites. For example :

1.18.7-8 *He without whom no sacrifice prospers, even of the wise man, he stirs the series of thoughts.*

*He makes the sacrificial work successful, he brings the sacrifice forward ; (through him) the oblation goes to the gods.*⁴⁸

2.20.5 *Indra having enjoyed the songs of praise of the Āngiras gave force to their prayer.*⁴⁹

6.1.1 *You, O Agni, were indeed the first inventor of this prayer, O wonderful one, and the (first) hotṛ. You, O Bull, made it an unconquerable power, in order to overcome every power.*⁵⁰

5.5.5 *O divine doors, open yourselves (and be) easy of access, for our assistance. Make the sacrifice complete in every respect (pra pra yajñam prṇītana).*⁵¹

3.2.5 *Men have placed Agni in the lead in order to obtain grace, him, the Rudra of the sacrifices, who makes successful the sacrifice of the working (priests).*⁵²

3.1.18 *In the house of mortal men has settled down the immortal king, who causes the sacrificial sessions to succeed.*⁵³

The efficiency, on one side conditioned and on the other side unconditioned, of the earthly sacrifice⁵⁴ has been the object of numerous disquisitions on the part of Vedists, who fluctuate at every step between giving a solely magical value to the Vedic sacrifice or acknowledging its religious and sacramental character. In our opinion a controversial point of the kind can only be clarified by paying attention to the Vedic doctrine of the three ṛtas or yajñas and their interrelations,

48. "yasmād ṛte na sidhyati yajño vipaścitaś cana/ sa dhīnām yogam invati."

"ād ṛdhnōti haviṣkṛtīm prāñcam kṛṇoty adhvaram/ hotṛā deveṣu gacchati."

49. "so āngirasām ucathā jujuṣvān brahmā tūto indro..."

50. "tvaṁ hy agne prathamō manotāsyā dhiyo abhavo dasma hotā/tvaṁ sīm vṛṣann akṛṇor duṣṭaritu saho viśvasmai sahase sahadhyai."

51. "devir dvāro vi śrayadhvaṁ supṛayaṇā na ūtaye/ pra pra yajñam prṇītana."

52. "agnīm sumnāya dadhire puro janā .../rudraṁ yajñānām sādhad iṣṭim apasām."

53. "ni duroṇe amṛto martyānām rājā sasāda vidathāni sādhan .."

54. See 1.150.1, 2.41.20, 4.24.1, 6.23.9, 7.7.1, 7.47.1, 7.95.6, etc.

a point very important indeed and yet almost completely overlooked. Before taking it into careful consideration, it would be better to abstain from applying arbitrary distinctions between what is magic and what is not magic in the Vedic liturgy⁵⁵, or speaking of different conceptions of the sacrifice in the Vedas in the sense in which Bergaigne, for instance, does.⁵⁶

55. According to Renou (*Vedic India*, pp. 94-95), "the distinction between sacrifice and magical act is slight. While it would be wrong to ascribe to the original sacrifice the speculations which the Brāhmaṇas develop or imply, it is clear that the magical idea predominates, that deprecations and expiations derived much more from magic than from religion in the true sense."

56. According to Bergaigne (*op. cit.*, vol II, pp. 226, 230) there are two different conceptions of the sacrifice. In the first one, man expects the results of the sacrifice as a recompense freely granted by the gods whom he implores in a spirit of submission. In the second one, man expects the result of the sacrifice as some sort of reward of justice and addresses the gods almost as his servants. The first conception, being—he says—the most natural would logically be also the oldest, whereas the second conception—the properly Vedic one according to him—would be more recent.

Bergaigne does not seem to be aware of the texts which inextricably mix together both conceptions and which in this way clearly contradict his apparently commonsensical point of view. Here are some of these passages which scarcely need any commentary :

1.150.1 *Since I spend a lot I speak to you as lord (master), Agni, who certainly is under your protection as under that of a great sceptre*
 "puru tvā dāśvān vocē" rir agne tava svid ā/todasyeva śaraṇa ā mahasya."

7.7.1 *Although he is a god, I spur—with reverence—your powerful Agni, like a strong racer*
 "devam cid vaḥ sahasānam agniṁ vājīnam aśvaṁ na namobhiḥ pra hiṣe."

7.95.6 *This Vasiṣṭha, o blessed Sarasvatī, has opened to you the doors of ṛta. Wax, o fair one, grant strength to him who lauds you. Protect us evermore, (o gods), with your blessing.*

"ayam u te sarasvati vasiṣṭho dvārāv ṛtasya subhage vy āvaḥ/vardha śubhre stuvate rāsi vājān yūyaṁ pāta svastibhiḥ sadā naḥ."
 Etc.

In our view the question here is not to discriminate between what is magic and what is not magic in the Vedic liturgy, but rather to be able to understand the infinite efficacy of the sacrifice, on account of its ultimate identity with the supreme *ṛta*, which enables it to be used even for the sake of magic, however much this might be against the spirit of the *Śruti*, which describes the gods as digging up the charms buried by the Asuras within these worlds and making them inoperative.⁵⁷ The double virtuality of the sacrifice is obviously one of the meanings of the scriptural image of Prajāpati or the Sacrifice as father not only of the “*devas*” but also of the “*asura / rakṣas*”. But we shall speak later of this problem in more detail.

The gods’ action in respect of the earthly liturgy does not merely consist in giving efficiency to it. Apart from that the gods rule, grace, perform the sacrifice of men and, if necessary, they atone for its faults or imperfections. Let us say something about each of these points.

We have already spoken of the gods as lords of *ṛta* or *yajña*. In reference to this Agni is called *the ruler of sacrifice* (*rājantam adhvarāṇām*) in 1.1.8, Rudra, *the lord of sacrifice* (*medhāpatim*) in 1.43.4, Vāyu, *the lord of ṛta* (*ṛtaspace*) in 8.26.21, etc.

Besides ruling, the gods bless, further and grace the sacrifice :

7.20.1 *The powerful one was born for hero-exploits, he, the young visitor to the sacrificial sessions in grace, Indra, our saviour, even of great sin.*⁵⁸

2.41.19 *May the two⁵⁹ who bring blessing to the sacrifice step forward. We choose you both and Agni who conveys the oblations.*⁶⁰

57. See *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3. 5. 4. 2-3.

58. “*ugro jajñe vīryāya.../jagmir yuvā nṛśadanam avobhis trātā na indra enaso mahaś cit.*”

59. According to the *Anukramaṇī* the two are the *havirdhāna*-carts or heaven and earth.

60. “*pretām yajñasya śambhuvā yuvām id ā vṛṇīmahe/agnim ca havya-vāhanam.*”

5.43.10 *To the sacrifice, to the songs and praises of the singer come you all, O Maruts, all in grace.*⁶¹

3.40.3 *Indra, promote with all the gods our gift-bestowing sacrifice, you highly lauded lord of men.*⁶²

7.69.5 *Your car, o car-drivers, which clothes itself in the dawns, makes its tour, yoked (by prayers). With it bring grace and blessing to this our sacrifice, O Aśvins, at dawn.*⁶³

1.23.17 *May those waters which are in the sun, or with which the sun is, further our sacrifice.*⁶⁴

Not only the gods rule, bless and further the sacrifice of men but they are also their invisible celebrants, as the following quotations say :

1.13.6 *May the divine doors open themselves in order to sacrifice.*⁶⁵

1.14.11 *Established by Manu as hotṛ, O Agni, you take seat at each sacrificial session. Do offer up for us this sacrifice.*⁶⁶

1.26.1 *Put on your robes, O worthy of oblation, and offer up this our sacrifice, O lord of powers.*⁶⁷

1.142.8 *May the two divine hotṛs and seers, the sweet-tongued lovers of the hymn, offer up this sacrifice of ours, so that it may be successful and reach heaven today.*⁶⁸

Apart from all this the gods are asked to mend the faults incurred during the celebration of the liturgy.

10.2.4 *If we violate your laws, O sages,*⁶⁹ *being ignorant as we*

61. “.. yajñam giro jarituh suṣṭutim ca viśve ganta maruto viśve ūti.”

62. “indra pra ṇo dhitāvānam yajñam viśvebhīr devebhiḥ/tira stavāna viśpate.”

63. “yo ha sya vām rathirā vasta usrā ratho yujānaḥ pariyāti vartih/ tena naḥ śam yor uśaso vyuṣṭau ny aśvinā vahataḥ yajñe asmin.”

64. “amūr yā upa sūrye yābhir vā sūryaḥ saha/tā no hinvantv adhvaram.”

65. “vi śrayantām. . dvāro devīr.../...yaṣṭave.”

66. “tvam hotā manurhito” gne yajñeṣu sīdasi/semaḥ no adhvaram yaja ”

67. “vasiṣvā hi miyedhya vastrāṇy ūrjām pate/ semaḥ no adhvaram yaja.”

68. “mandrajihvā jugurvaṇi hotārā daivyā kavi/yajñam no yakṣatām imam siddham adya diviṣṛam.”

69. Literally, *the laws of you who know.*

are, O gods, may Agni fill up all the gaps, he who knows at which time to honour the gods.⁷⁰

2.34.10 speaks in relation to this of the march that the Maruts undertake in order to cast on Trita (according to the Veda the receiver of maimed offerings and so on) the faults of the liturgical singers :

Wonderful is considered the march of the Maruts⁷¹, whether they milk as friends the udder of Pṛṣni (for us), or whether (they go) to Trita, for the sake of (casting on him) the fault of the singer and the old age of the old, they, the unassailable sons of Rudra.⁷²

The intervention of the gods in the liturgy of men shows under another light to what extent the priestly character of the gods has been consolidated and emphasized in the Vedas, unlike in other Indo-European traditions.

It has been said that the sacrifice of the gods is finally nothing but a mythical extension of the sacrifice of men despite what the Śruti says. According to Bergaigne, who often insists on this point⁷³, the myth would have been formed in the following way : "The Vedic Aryans, while entrusting their dead to the fire, which carried them with him to the higher regions, peopled heaven with inhabitants who were logically supposed to give themselves in their new abode to the same works which they used to perform on earth and above all to the work *par excellence*, the sacrifice".⁷⁴ From the idea of

70. Literally, *he who knows at which time one might honour the gods.*

"Kalpayāti" is conjunctive.

The Sanskrit runs : "yad vo vayan̄ pramināma vratāni viduṣāṃ devā aviduṣṭarāsaḥ/ agniṣ ṭad viśvam ā prṇāti vidvān yebhir devāṃ ṛtubhiḥ kalpayāti."

71. Literally, *wonderful is considered your march, O Maruts.*

72. "citram tad vo maruto yāma cekite prānyā yad ūdhar apy āpayo duhuḥ / yad vā nide navamānasya rudriyās tritaṃ jarāya juratām adābhyāḥ."

73. "Mais le sacrifice des dieux, prototype de celui des hommes dans la croyance des ṛṣis, n'en est en somme qu'une extension mythique."
See A. Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique*, vol II. p. 238.

74. See A. Bergaigne, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 101-102.

the pitrs as sacrificers one must have passed by steps to the idea of the gods as sacrificers, given the intimate connection, which the *Rg Veda* establishes, between pitrs and devas.

There are some passages in the *Rg Veda*, which seem to favour Bergaigne's assumption. Thus 10.92.3 tells us for instance of the *Āngiras* :

*When the awe-inspiring ones had attained immortality they attained the divine race*⁷⁵ and 10.151.3 speaks of the cult that the devas have rendered to the ancient gods or *asūras* : *As the devas have rendered a faithful cult to the powerful Asūras* .⁷⁶

According to these texts the pitrs give themselves to the same activity in heaven, which they used to perform on earth and the gods no more than imitate their conduct with respect to the powerful *Asuras*. The celestial liturgy follows therefore the same pattern as the earthly liturgy does. These passages, however, apart from being exceptional, are obscure and can be interpreted in various ways. In contradistinction to them the vast majority of texts speaking of the celestial liturgy depict pitrs and devas as busying themselves with quite different functions from those of the earthly priests. Thus 10.56.5, describing the sacrificial activities of the fathers, says :

*By their might they have travelled over the entire space, measuring the immeasurable primordial abodes. All beings were firmly rooted in them. Gradually they released the creatures in many ways.*⁷⁷

As for the devas we have already seen the essential characteristics of their sacrificial activity.

Even though Bergaigne has no objection to reckon these and similar texts as evidence for his assumption, it is obvious that they can also be interpreted so as to weaken his assumption and even directly to contradict it, for they depict the heavenly sacrificers as doing something quite different from what the earthly sacrificers are supposed to do.

To us the Vedic myths are something more than "reflections or shadows of man cast upon clouds" as the anthropolo-

75. "...yadā ghorāso amṛtatvam āsatād ij janasya daivyasya cakiran."

76. "yathā devā asureṣu śraddhām ugreṣu cakrire..."

77. "sahobhir viśvaṁ pari cakramū rajah pūrvā dhāmāny amitā mimānāḥ/tanūṣu viśvā bhūvanā ni yemire prāsārayanta purudha praṇanu."

gical school would have it and still less a "disease of language" as the philological hypothesis of Max Müller etc. pretends.

Not that we completely refuse to accept any reconstruction concerning formation of myths, but we are certainly not prepared to accept it on the strength of an evidence as doubtful as the one Bergaigne offers. And yet we do not entirely dislike the expression "mythical extension", if by it one does not understand merely that the liturgy of heaven follows the model of that on earth, as Bergaigne pretends⁷⁸, but that the action of the gods in heaven conforms itself to the same law that governs the liturgy on earth, or, to put in another way, that the earthly rites have ultimately the same meaning as the divine operations. There are specific reasons why the action of the gods in heaven deserves the designation of *ṛta* or *yajña* from the Vedic standpoint. For instance, because it is creative and not sterile, because it sets in motion the stream of riches instead of obstructing it, because it is generous and not avaricious or egoistical. Even before creation the *devas* are described to us as offering gifts to each other, while the *asuras* no more than sacrifice "to their own mouth", to their own comfort, completely unmindful of the welfare of others, of the participation of others in their own wealth.

Once upon a time the gods and the asuras both of them sprung from Prajāpati, strove together. And the asuras, even through arrogance, thinking "Unto whom, forsooth, should we make offering?" went on offering into their own mouths. They came to naught, even through arrogance : wherefore let no one be arrogant, for verily arrogance is the cause of ruin.

*But the gods went on making offerings unto one another. Prajāpati gave himself up to them : thus the sacrifice became theirs, and indeed the sacrifice is the food of the gods.*⁷⁹

It is because the action of the gods is as it is that Prajāpati gives himself up to them, that is to say, the sacrifice becomes theirs, becomes their food and their very life. And it

78. "Il est vrai que le sacrifice céleste étant en réalité l'image, et non, comme le veulent le *ṛsis*, le type du sacrifice terrestre..."

See A. Bergaigne, *op. cit.*, vol. II. p. 20.

79. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 5,1.1.1-2.

is for all this that the gods' action deserves the name of sacrifice in the Vedic sense of the word. If we would analyze it deeply, we would see that from the Vedic point of view there are even specific reasons to depict the heavenly sacrifice in the style of the earthly one, to wit, with a sacrificial fire, with offerings, with hymns, etc., without being necessary to postulate a mythical extension of the kind Bergaigne proposes. But for this we should have to go deeply into the question of the adhyātmic interpretation of the sacrifice. This is however a point with which we cannot busy ourselves here without running the risk of being too long. On the other side to say something about it in a fragmentary way would lend itself to misunderstandings which we would wish to avoid. We hope to deal extensively with this question in a future essay. Meanwhile it is sufficiently clear that from the Vedic standpoint it is not at all gratuitous to designate the gods' action in heaven as ṛta or yajña and that this designation can be perfectly independent of any imaginary projection of the earthly ritual upon the clouds of heaven. In our opinion there is no question here of a mythical extension in the way Bergaigne understands it, but rather of a concrete intuition of the truth enunciated by *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.4.10 :

What is here, the same is there; and what is there the same is here.

CHAPTER III

THE SACRIFICE OF MEN

The sacrifice of men does not only follow, as we have seen, the model of the sacrifice of the gods, does not only derive from it its efficiency, but it is also, according to the Vedas, of entirely celestial origin, both concerning its various integrant elements and its totality. This is one of the first things to consider, when speaking about the Vedic conception of the earthly liturgy. Not only the less tangible elements of the sacrifice—prayers, mantras, etc.—are said to proceed from the divine plane, but even its more tangible elements, such as the sacrificial fire and the offerings, are supposed to mysteriously descend from there during the sacrificial session. This is a point which has been often commented upon Bergaigne, for example, makes several references to it in the course of his study of the Vedic religion. It is interesting to reread some of his viewpoints on the matter. See, for instance, what he says about the celestial origin of the liturgical prayer :

“Between the prayer and its celestial prototypes there is not only simple assimilation, but also identity of nature and origin. The prayers addressed to Viṣṇu and to the Maruts receive the qualification of “*giri-jāh*”, *born in the mountain*, 5.87.1, that is to say, springing...from heaven. This is because the word has its womb in the waters, in the sea (cf. 5.44.9, 5.55.11), from where it has spread all over the worlds, 10.125.7. The ancient prayer of the fathers which is recited in the assembly and which clothes itself in bright garments is *born from heaven*, 3.39.2.”

“The word that men invoke today as a goddess, the divine word, has been *engendered* by the gods, 8.89.11, hence.

the epithet "devatta", given by the gods, applied to the human prayer, 1.37.4, 8.32.27; see 2.34.7, 7.97.5, 8.75.2. One asks, as we have seen, to Agni to bring the prayer that has *shone* in heaven, 6.16.36. The present hymn, that is to say, the one that resounds actually on earth is that of the immortals, the one they had uttered at the time when they themselves desired treasures... and were making this prayer and the sacrifice, 10.74.3..."¹

Among the tangible elements of the sacrifice, the fire is one of those which is more repeatedly conceived by the ṛsis as coming down from heaven. Here is one of Bergaigne's comments on the point :

"It is said besides in proper terms that Agni has been established by the gods as sacrificer of all the sacrifices of the human race, 6.16.1, that shining first among those who have a vast abode (the gods), 10.118.8, he has been *kindled* by them as bearer of the offerings of the human race, *ibid.* 9. More generally the bringing of the fire to men which we have seen ascribed to personages of ambiguous nature, now men, now gods, like Mātariśvan and the Bhṛguṣ, is also directly attributed to the gods themselves. They have laid down Agni among the mortals, 8.73.2, among the human races, 2.4.3, they have laid him down here, 3.3.5, they have made of him the first Āyu for the Āyu, 1.31.11, they have given him to Manu, 1.36.10..."²

What happened in the past is supposed to mysteriously repeat itself at each sacrificial session, as the following texts clearly indicate :

7.7.5 *The chosen bearer (of sacrifices), Agni, has been established at his arrival as the high-priest in the sacrificial session, as the ordainer.*³

1.148.3 *He whom the worshipful ones have now seized in his eternal abode and established (here) with praises; quick in their*

1. A. Bergaigne *La Religion Védique*, vol. I, pp. 237, 293.

2. A. Bergaigne, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 112.

3. "asādi vṛto vahnir ājaganvān agnir brahmā nṛṣadane vidhartā..."

*search, like chariot-horses, they have brought him down, holding him fast.*⁴

3.9.6 *O bearer of oblations to the gods, the mortals have held you fast, that you may watch over all the sacrifices, O god belonging to men, with your wisdom, most youthful one.*⁵

6.16.13 *Atharvan rubbed you from the lotus-flower, O Agni, you the priests, from the head of the world.*⁶

Fire is not the only palpable element of the sacrifice which is conceived by the Vedic seers as descending from heaven. Soma also is conceived in the same manner, as Bergaigne throws repeatedly into relief :

"It remains to be shown that the earthly Soma has descended from heaven. I quote first the formal texts. One reads in verse 9.66.30 that the *milk* of Soma has been brought from heaven, in verse 9.61.10, that Soma, born up there from a plant and dwelling in heaven, has been received by the earth, in verse 9.63.27, that the Somas have been scattered from heaven and from the atmosphere over the surface of the earth."

"This myth (the myth of Soma brought from heaven by a bird) has been "fixed" with the epithet "*śyena-bhṛta*": *brought by the eagle*, 1.80.2, 8.84.3, 9.87.6 and "*śyena-jūta*": *set in motion by the eagle*, 9.89.2, applied to Soma. It is parallel to that of Agni 'brought down by Mātariśvan' and this parallelism is even expressly indicated in the verse 6 of the hymn 1.93 to Agni and Soma *Mātariśvan has brought one from heaven, the eagle has extracted the other from the (celestial) mountain* (by means of a kind of *churning* "*amathnāt*")"⁷

See further the words of 4.26.6 on this point :

Bearing the stalk and hastening forward the eagle, the bird (brought) from afar the draught that gladdens; friend of the gods

4. "nitye cin nu yañ sadane jagṛbhre praśastibhir dadhire yajñīyāsaḥ/ pra sū nayanta gṛbhayanta iṣṭiv aśvāso na rathyo rārahāṇāḥ."

5. "tañ tvā martā agṛbhṇata devebhyo havyavāhana/viśvān yad yajñīm abhipāsi mānuṣa tava kratvā yaviṣṭya."

6. "tvām agne puṣkarād adhy atharvā nir amanthata/mūrdhno viśvasya vāghataḥ."

7. A. Bergaigne, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 171 and 173.

he brought the Soma holding it fast, having taken it from that highest heaven.⁸

In the Vedic perspective all this is not merely gesticulations of the past, but facts which repeat themselves at present, during the liturgical celebration, although in an invisible way. This is at least what the same hymn (4.26.4) tells us two stanzas above :

*May that bird precede the (other) birds, when it will bring to man the oblation in which the gods delight.*⁹

Regarding the same point 1.128.7 makes reference to the human offerings in general as prepared in heaven by Ilā herself, one of the celestial rivers and goddesses. It says :

*He (Agni) is the lord of the oblations of mankind, produced by Ilā herself (ilākṛtāni).*¹⁰

Not only the fire and the offerings are envisaged by the ṛṣis as coming down from heaven but even the very sacrificial posts, as the two following passages tell us :

3.8.4 *Youthful, well robed, covered, he has come (the sacrificial post). Him the wise seers, thoughtful, raise up, worshipping the gods in their heart.*¹¹

3.8.9. *Like swans advancing in rows, the sacrificial posts have come to us dressed in white, (and) while they are raised up by the seers in the East, the gods enter the divine paths.*¹²

Bergaigne identifies the bright posts come down to the earth with the dawns, which represent indeed the posts of the celestial sacrifices.¹³ It is these divine posts, not necessarily to be taken in a naturalistic sense, that the seers raise up in the

8. "r̥jīpi śyeno dadamāno aṁśum parāvataḥ śakuno mandram madam/ somam bharad dādṛhāṇo devāvān divo amuṣmād uttarād ādāya."

9. "pra su śu vibhyo...vis astu.../...yat...havyam bharan manave devajusṭam."

10. "...sa havyā mānuṣāṇām ilā kṛtāni patyate..."

11. 'yuvā suvāḥ parivīta āgāt.../tam dhīrāsaḥ kavaya unnayanti svādh- yo manasā devayantaḥ."

12. "haṁsā iva śreṇīso yatānāḥ śukrā vasānāḥ svaravo na āguḥ/unniya- mātāḥ kavibhiḥ purastād devā devānām api yanti pāthaḥ."

13. A Bergaigne, *op. cit.*

form of sacrificial stakes at the beginning of the liturgical assembly. The meaning of all this is commented upon in several places in the Brāhmaṇas. Thus, for instance, the *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* (10.1-2) says, among other things :

The sacrificial post is a thunderbolt. In that they erect the post on the fast day, verily thus with a thunderbolt they smite away the evil of the sacrificer...

They say... "One should not measure the post : let it be unmeasured; the measured by the measured one wins; the unmeasured by the unmeasured; (therefore it serves) to win the incommensurable." "Both for the post and the altar (he should choose) the size which he considers in his mind suitable", (Kauṣītaki) used to say. Mind is Prajāpati; Prajāpati is the sacrifice; the sacrifice itself rejoices in the sacrifice when mind in mind...

For it when being placed erect he recites (verses) containing the words "erect" and "up". "Rise erect, O Lord of the Forest"... "Aloft do thou guard us from tribulation with thy ray." He concludes with (a verse) containing the word "covered round" : "the youth, well clad, covered round, hath come..."

If the different elements of the sacrifice from the less tangible to the more palpable descend all of them from heaven, it means that the entire sacrifice descends also therefrom. That is, I believe, what the following verses mean :

5.41.7 *Morning and night, omniscient as it were, bring the sacrifice to the mortal.*¹⁴

7.43.2 *May the sacrifice come forward like a courser to be*

14. "...uṣāsānaktā viduṣīva viśvam ā hā vahato martyāya yajñam,"

I do not think that the verse speaks of figurative bringing, but of a literal bringing, though secret. I understand in the same sense 2.3.6 :

Morning and night, become strong, (bring) to us the sacrificial works, well, uninterruptedly. The two copious milk-cows, ornament of the sacrifice, (are) like two gay weavers, interweaving together a continuous (sacrificial) web.

"sādhv apāṃsi sanatā na ukṣite uṣāsānaktā vayyeva ranvite/tantum tatan samvayanti samīci yajñasya peśaḥ sudughe payasvatī."

urged. *Strew well the sacred grass to receive the sacrifice.*¹⁵

What happens now happened already in the beginning :

10.181.3 *Meditating in their heart they discovered the sacrifice that had descended, the first pathway to the gods.*¹⁶

Commenting upon this last point Bergaigne makes the following remarks :

"The rites of the sacrifice have been transmitted by tradition from the first ancestors of the human race to their last descendants...

But the first ancestors themselves, from whom did they have the sacrifice ? We will successively ascertain for the various elements of the sacrifice what we have already ascertained for the first and most important among them, the fire, to wit, that one attributed to them a celestial origin. Now what was believed about the elements of the sacrifice was also believed of the sacrifice itself. We read in the verses 10.181.1-3 not only that Vasiṣṭha, that Bharadvāja, that a band of ancient, unnamed sacrificers, have brought or received from heaven...this or that offering, this or that particular prayer, but also, that they have *found, praying, the fallen sacrifice, the first sacrifice going towards the gods*. The term is formal, like the fire, the sacrifice itself has *fallen* from heaven; men therefore limit themselves to sending it back there as they do with the fire."¹⁷

In a way the earthly sacrifice is nothing other than the celestial sacrifice coming down to the earth and working through men, who limit themselves to promote or let pass through them the currents of Ṛta proceeding from the gods' plane, as one can see from the words of 2.28.5 :

May we promote the stream of your ṛta, O Varuṇa. Do not

15. "pra yajña etu hetvo na saptir.../stṛṇīta barhīr adhvarāya sādhu..."

The barhis strewn to receive the gods is also strewn to receive the sacrifice. Similar interpretation by Geldner.

16. "te' vindan manasā dīdhyānā yajuḥ śkannam prathamam devayānam..."

17. A. Bergaigne, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 107.108.

*crush before time the full measure of the holy work.*¹⁸

All this agrees with the numerous passages in the Veda in which the sacrifice is connected with the idea of travelling, journeying, which seems to be the significance of the designation "adhvara" that the sacrifice receives in many places and which etymologically means *the going, the travelling*. The sacrifice is the resplendent cart that circulates through the world pouring down the divine riches. Its course, however, takes place in the mystery. Hence the insistence of the Brāhmaṇas on the invisible, secret character of the sacrifice, which corresponds wholly to the invisible and mysterious character of the gods themselves, the priests *par excellence*.¹⁹

The myth of the celestial origin of the elements of the cult and of the sacrifice itself, which is a particular form of the general myth of heaven as father, creator or progenitor, is by no means a peculiarity of the Vedic tradition: it is equally found in more or less similar forms in a variety of contexts. What is characteristic of the Vedic tradition is the predominant importance of the myth, which completely eclipses in the Vedas the equally attested myth of the autochthonic origin of things, connected everywhere with the cult of the "Terra Mater", typical of the cultures with matriarchal tendencies.²⁰

The myth of the emergence of the human beings from the depths of the earth and of their gestation in the entrails of the earth, (so characteristic, for instance, of the Indian cultures of America), has hardly any relevance in the Vedic tradition, where it is completely eclipsed by the myth of the celestial origin,—concretely solar origin—of the human race. The mystical feeling of being autochthonous, of having been born from the earth in a manner comparable to that in which the rocks, the springs, or the trees are born from it, this mystical feeling

18. "ṛdhyāma te varuṇa kbām ṛtasya/mā...chedi...mātrā īāry apasah pura ṛtoḥ"

19. See *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.1.3.25: *Not visibly indeed is the sacrifice to be taken hold of, as is either this staff or the garment—but invisibly indeed are the gods, invisible is the sacrifice.*

20. It is more accurate to speak of matriarchal tendencies in cultures than of matriarchal cultures as such, for we do not know whether the matriarchate ever existed as an independent cultural cycle.

which gives the peculiar sensation of deeply pertaining to the soil and of communion with the physical environment, is almost wholly absent in the Vedic culture, as it is fitting in a semi-nomadic people of warriors, who made a profound mysticism of its lack of fortresses, strongholds and ramparted towns. The feeling of autochthony is typical of the sedentary people, of the planters, with more or less matriarchal traits of culture. Among them the feeling of the mother earth, of the native soil (to be taken in a literal sense) suffuses the language with expressions which the passing of time does not erase. Thus the toponymy of Europe echoes even at present the ancient belief that children come from the entrails of the earth, from caverns, grottoes, fissures and springs. "Every region and almost every town and village", says M. Eliade, "knows a rock or a spring which brings children by some such name as *Kinderbrunnen*, *Kinderteiche* or *Bubenquellin*." "According to innumerable beliefs, women became pregnant whenever they approached certain places : rocks, caves, trees or rivers."²¹

The identification of the earth with the archetype of the "Urmutter" or *Primordial Mother*, as a cosmic potency, which creates the beings, either by parthenogenesis, or by self-immolation, or by a fecundation from above, is at the root of a series of religious practices. This identification explains the mystical significance of the caverns and grottoes in the palaeolithic period, when the cavern was at the same time the theatre of initiation and the place where the dead were buried. The ritual penetration into the cavern obscurely implied that return to the primal reality which so many initiatic and funeral rites precognize. The funeral by inhumation is everywhere related to the mysticism of the "Terra Mater". The satisfaction of being buried in the "Mother Land" is often expressed in Roman sepulchral inscriptions : "hic natus, hic situs est," *here he was born, here he is laid*. Perfect autochthony embraces the complete cycle of life, from birth to death : one has to return to the Mother. *Creep back to the earth, your mother* !²² says the *R̥g Veda* (10.18.10)

21. M. Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, pp. 165-166.

22. "upa sarpa mātaraṁ bhūmim..."

The funeral by inhumation is the concrete manner in which man expresses his desire to go back to the bosom of the mother earth. Contrariwise, the funeral by cremation is in connection with the desire to return to a celestial plane from which one believes to have descended. The idea that fire ensures a celestial destiny after death is found not only in India, but also in other cultures, for instance, among the peoples of Septentrional Asia, who believe, besides, that a person struck by lightning automatically ascends to heaven. The fire transforms man into an ethereal substance and as a psychopomp enables him to climb up the heights from where he has descended. One could say in the words of the New Testament that from the mythical standpoint the man from heaven has a celestial destiny, just as the man from the earth has an earthly destiny. The progressive substitution of the funeral by inhumation by the rites of cremation, which is clearly apparent from several passages of the Vedic literature, is a proof of the total predominance of the mysticism of the "*Patria celestialis*" above the religious conceptions centered around the concept of the "*Terra Mater*". A still more decisive proof can be found in the complete irrelevance of the concept of the underworld in the Vedic theology. One cannot find in the Vedas anything comparable not only to the hells of torments described in Christianity or in Buddhism, but even to a sombre abyss as the one described in the Iranian tradition. The abyss of which the Vedas speak does not seem to be an inferior abyss, as that of Zoroastrianism, but a kind of superior abyss, which corresponds to that highest and remotest part of the universe. This is the supreme theatre of the constant combats between the forces of *ṛta* and *anṛta*, between the forces promoting the creation and redemption of the world and those tending to obstruct them. Their defeat represents rather their own transformation than their destruction, even though the texts often speak of annihilation and death, for by the fact of giving in, of opening himself, *Vṛtra* becomes Soma, as the Brāhmaṇas point out time and again. The enchantment and slumber of which the Veda speaks as a chastisement of *Vṛtras* and *Paṇis* by no means enable us to infer the existence of a kind of Sheol or Hades in the Vedic conception, a world of shadows as was imagined by the Greeks

or by the Israelites. And even supposing that such a world would have existed in the thought of the Vedic Aryans, it would have more to do with the depths of the celestial waters than with the concept of underworld as it is generally understood.

So, in the case of the Veda the celestial origin of the elements of the sacrifice and of the sacrifice itself is situated in an ambit of peculiar connotations, which one has to bear in mind, if one wants to have an accurate picture of it.

As we have said the earthly sacrifice is the continuation of the celestial sacrifice. This continuity, however does not imply succession in time. On the contrary, if we have to believe the texts there is simultaneity of both. To quote some relevant passages :

6 2.3 *When this human race, devout, performs libations during the sacrifice, the heavenly heroes kindle you, the standard of the sacrifice, with simultaneous delight (sajoṣaḥ)*²³

7.97.1 *To the sacrifice, to the combined assembly of heaven and earth, (divaḥ pṛthivyāḥ nṛṣadane), where the devout people feast, where libations are effused for Indra, may he (Indra) come first for his great joy and also the winged troops of heaven (vayaś ca).*²⁴

1.10.4 *Come, O good Indra, approve, accept, cheer complacently the songs and strengthen together with us (sacā naḥ) the prayer and the sacrifice.*²⁵

1.173.2 *May the bull sing together with the bulls who offer their sweat*²⁶, *like a hungry wild animal that would roar above (the others).*²⁷

23. "sajoṣas tvā divo naro yajñasya ketum indhate/yaddha sya mānuṣo janaḥ sumnāyur juhve adhvare."

24. "yajñe divo nṛṣadane pṛthivyā naro yatra devayavo madanti/indrāya yatra savanāni sunve gaman madāya prathamam vayaś ca."

25. "chi stomām abhi svarā' bhi gṛṇīly ā ruva/ brahma ca no vaso sacendra yajñam ca vardhaya,"

26. The sacrificers practising tapas. I translate the verse as if the relative pronoun was "yaḥ" instead of "yat", for it gives in my opinion a better meaning.

27. "arcad vṛṣā vṛṣabhiḥ sveduhavyair mṛgo nāśno ati yajjuguryāt..."

An essential characteristic of the earthly sacrifice is that of being one throughout time, without solution of continuity. One does not perform the sacrifice, one spreads it, as one spreads the continuous web of a fabric :

1.142.1 *Spin out the ancient thread, (O Agni), for the offerer who has pressed the Soma.*²⁸

10.130.6 *With the mind as an eye I think to see those who offered first this sacrifice (imam yajñam).*²⁹

3.31.9 *They sat down with eager mind themselves making a way to immortality with the help of the hymns. This sacrificial session of theirs is even now frequent (idam sadanam eṣām cit nu bhūri).*³⁰

3.53.7 *These liberal men (the sacrificers) are the Aṅgiras in another form, the sons of heaven, the heroes of the Asura.*³¹

The present sacrifice is one with the ancient one. The priests of the present are in another form the pitṛs of old. This is a point to which Bergaigne has not failed to pay attention :

"The sacrifice of the present time is...itself Manu's ceremony (3.26.2)", he says. "*The offerings of the priest Manu with which Agni had formerly accomplished the sacrifice (1.76.5) keep still the same name (1.36.7, 2.2.5, 2.6.8, 4.2.1, 10.11.5) As for the place where the sacrifice is presently celebrated, is it not called perhaps the abode of Manu...in remembrance of the first sacrificer (7.70.2, 8.76.2, 10, 110, 1, cf. 10.104.4) ?*

Agni is instituted sacrificer (1.44.11, 1.105. 13-14) by the present priests as he had been so by Manu...and he accomplishes the sacrifice for them as he had accomplished it for Manu (7.11.3).

A poet, while saying that his hymns are addressed to Indra as of old names Manu together with Atharvan and Dadhyañc among those who have spread as on a loom this prayer that he continues weaving (1.80.10)."³²

28. "...tantum tanuṣva pūrvyam sutasomāya dāṣuṣc."

29. "...paśyan manye manasā cakṣasā tām ya imam yajñam ayajanta pūrve."

30. "...ni gavyatā manasā sedur arkaiḥ kṛtvānāso amṛtatvāya gātum/idam cin nu sadanam bhūry eṣām..."

31. "...ime bhojā aṅgirasō virūpā divas putrāso asurasya virāḥ..."

32. A. Bergaigne, *op cit.*, vol. I, pp. 66-67.

One of the things which is more helpful in drawing the fundamental traits of the Vedic liturgy is the description of its various functions. Ordinarily one emphasizes so much the individual, not to say the individualistic, character of the Vedic cult³³, that one is under the impression that the Vedic sacrifice was merely a function of the individual and not of the community. But this is an impression as unjustified as would be to say regarding the Catholic cult to be individualistic in character on account of the medieval institution of the "stipendia missarum". A detailed study of the prayers and aspirations that appear in the Vedic hymns convinces us of the social, but also the cosmic function that the Vedic Aryans attributed to their liturgy.

It is certain that the Vedic sacrifice had an individual scope, but it had no less a social, a national and a universal scope. It is good to review these various functions of the same cultual work. Perhaps the best way to do it is by quoting a series of characteristic passages, that illustrate better than any commentary the various mentioned functions of the sacrifice in the Vedic conception.

As for the individual function of the sacrifice it is abundantly clear from the following passages :

1.184.5 *Make your circular tour for the benefit of our children and our own person, O Nāsatyas.*³⁴

2.9.2 *O Agni, watch with your light over our children and our own persons for ever, as indefatigable protector.*³⁵

3.53.2 *I grasp the hem (of your garment) like a son that of his father, with sweetest song, O mighty Indra.*³⁶

As for the social functions of the sacrifice the following quotations are quite illustrative :

33. "Le culte védique est un culte essentiellement individuel." See A. Bergaigne, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 300.

34. "...yātāṃ vartīs tanayāya tmane cāgastye nāsatyā..."

35. "...agne tokasya nas tane tanūnām aprayucchan didyad bodhi gopāḥ."

36. "...pitur na putraḥ sicam ā rabhe ta indra svādiṣṭhaya girā śicivāḥ."

1.91.12 *Conferring prosperity on the household and driving away disease stay, O Soma, with us, as a friend.*³⁷

1.104.7 *Indra, give to the hungry strengthening food and drink.*³⁸

1.114.1 *To the mighty Rudra we direct our thoughts, so that it be well with men and animals, and all the rearing in this village be healthy.*³⁹

3.58.3 *Why have the sages of old called precisely you, O Āsvins, those who succour better in necessity?*⁴⁰

7.1.19 *Give us not up, O Agni, to want of sons, or to a tattered poverty, or to hunger, or to injury, O holy one.*⁴¹

Besides the social function of the sacrifice one has to bear in mind its social implications. As far as I know almost nothing has been written about the social implications of the doctrine of ṛta/yajña in the Veda. Whenever one searches for the social influence of the sacrifice, or, more generally, of ṛta, in the works dealing with the Vedic period the only thing one comes across is a description *de facto* of the social and political organisations, of the warlike and peaceful avocations, etc, but nothing resembling a description of the social values during the Vedic period, at least in relation to the doctrine of the sacrifice. When one speaks of ṛta it is at the most to indicate its moral implications and this only if it is not downgraded to the status of mere ritual exactness or precision, as it is done by Sylvain Levi, or to that of a quasi-magic potency dominating the cosmos, as it would appear from some passages of Lüders. Reading the work of Rau and others on the Vedic period one gets so disappointed about the Vedic society as described by them that one feels tempted to agree with Keith when he says

37. "gayasphāno amīvahā...sumitraḥ soma no bhava."

38. "...indra kṣudhyadbhyo vaya āsutim dāḥ."

39. "...imā rudrāya tavase...pra bharāmahe matiḥ/ yathā śam asad dvipa-de catuṣpade viśvaṁ puṣṭam grāme asminn anāturam."

40. "...kim aṅga vām praty avartim gamiṣṭhāhur viprāso āśvinā purā-jāḥ."

41. "mā no agne' virate parā dā durvāsase' mataye mā no asyai/mā naḥ kṣudhe mā rakṣase ṛtāvo..."

that moral values inherent in the concept of ṛta were very soon lost sight of by the Vedic Indians.

And yet it is impossible that the doctrine of ṛta/yajña have not had strong social repercussions, if, as Durkheim says, "men have believed in (their myths) no less firmly than in their own sensations; they have based their conduct upon them."⁴² There is no human society in which its basal beliefs have not been daily proved in the life and experience of the people, besides being rehearsed in liturgies, interpreted by seers and theologians and experienced in ecstatic visions. Doctrines such as the generosity of Indra or the immolation of Puruṣa cannot have failed to have a profound influence on the way of thinking and living of the Indian Aryans of the Vedic and the subsequent periods. Regarding the first point it is worthwhile noticing that the conduct of Aryan leaders in the combat was positively inspired by the example of Indra, as it is said by M. Palihawadana in his book *The hero in the Indo-Aryan Society of the Proto-historic Period* (p. 29) :

"What the stanzas quoted above indicate in respect of the earthly "sūri" deserves our special attention, for they emphasize the fact that in the *Rg Veda* the leader is represented not really as one who should grow rich by means of battles and combats but rather as one who should distribute what he gains." This indeed is what *Jaimini Brāhmaṇa* 2.140 says in so many words : *The king on gaining victory, causes his dependents to share the spoils.*

Just as the example of Indra established the pattern to be followed in the case of the distribution of the booty after the battles, in the same way the example of Puruṣa/Prajāpati gave the norm to be followed by any sacrificer who sincerely aspired to the attainment of immortality, as can be seen from the following quotations :

Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 6.3.9 *He who performs the dīkṣā sacrifices his person by way of a victim to all the gods.*

Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 6.9.9 *He who performs the dīkṣā is immolated as a ritual victim by all the gods.*

42. E. Durkheim, *The elementary forms of the religious life*, p. 102.

Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 3.3.4.21 *He who performs the dikṣā becomes a nourishment offered to the gods.*

Taittirīya Saṃhitā 7.4.9.1 *By the dikṣā the whole body has an aureole of flames.*

It is interesting to notice that the myth of Puruṣa/Prajāpati has not only had a ritual significance, but even a concrete physical version. As a matter of fact it served to remodel in India an ancient custom, which according to Frobenius⁴³ had an area of diffusion, going from East Africa to the Malabar coast passing by South Arabia. We are referring to the practice of regicide. The particular features that this practice presented in the region of Malabar (an area having a strongly matriarchal tradition to this day) show beyond doubt the concrete influence of the myth of Puruṣa/Prajāpati in the formation of the ritual. We read in the book of Duarte Barbosa, *Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the beginning of the XVI century* (p. 172), cited by Frazer, that in the South Indian province of Quilacare in Malabar it was a custom of the kings to immolate themselves for the people's welfare. The king had to sacrifice himself at the end of a period of twelve years, the time required for the complete circuit of the zodiac on the part of the planet Jupiter. When the time came the king himself built a wooden scaffolding surrounded by silk curtains. Thereafter he processionally went to the temple at the sound of music and accompaniment of drums in order to worship the deity, not without first having had before a ritual bath in one of the sacred ponds. Then he climbed the scaffolding and, taking in his hands a set of very sharp knives in front of the people, he proceeded to orderly cut parts of his body: the nose, the ears, the lips, and the rest of his limbs—casting everything around, until he started fainting with the loss of blood, at which time he himself cut the throat, thus completing the sacrifice.

The persistence of such a custom even in XVI century shows under another light to what an extent the myth of Prajāpati did leave a lasting impression in the mind and heart of

43. See L. Frobenius, *Schicksalskunde im Sinne des Kulturwerdens*, p. 127.

the Indian people, serving to remodel completely a practice in itself totally independent of the Vedic tradition, for it is attested not only in India, but also in Indonesia, in the Upper Nile and Sudan, as well as in Mozambique, Angola and Rhodesia. Moreover from the evidence of several archaeological discoveries it can be stated with great assurance that in the earliest period of the hieratic city state the king and his retinue were ritually immolated at the end of a span of years astronomically calculated.

Another Vedic concept which was likely to have social repercussions was the fundamental idea of the sacrifice as the act of promoting and letting pass the stream of riches, taking only for oneself what is needed and letting flow the rest. This idea must have created to begin with those feelings of generosity which the Veda exalts in so many places, sometimes perhaps expressing the greediness of some priests. Apart from this the Vedic conception of the sacrifice as the promoter of a generous distribution of the riches must have definitely created a strong animadversion against the spirit of hoarding and monopolizing. A proof for this is that the Vedas do not hesitate to transpose the invectives directed against Vṛtras and Paṇis to the misers and hoarders on earth, whom they designate with the same abominable names of Paṇis, adevas, ayajñas, etc., for degrading themselves to the condition of true demons (by which one should understand not demons tortured in hell, like in the Semitic tradition, but just beings who do not want to sacrifice anything of their possession, but want to enjoy it alone in a completely egoistical and sterile way).

The hoarding, the monopoly, is the first capital sin in the eyes of the Veda and not without reason for it is the most opposed to the order of ṛta/yajña enforced by the Veda. Besides it cannot be excused as a human weakness (which the Vedas consider as an attenuating factor in various cases), since it derives from a hardening, a perversion of the heart, which makes man similar to a real devil.

We do not know to what extent the theological conception of ṛta/yajña has influenced the Indian society, even though it is *traditionally* believed that it did really inform it

completely. Whatever it may be, it is a fact that even many centuries after the Vedic period the Indian society presents a series of traits and values which do not disavow the most fundamental Vedic conceptions. Thus, for instance, in the eve of the preaching of the Buddha, we are informed by various sources, that the spending power of the poor and of the middle class man was notable. On the other side, it was considered as the direst misfortune that a free man should work for wages. As for land there was plenty of it not far from the settlements for anyone who would take the trouble of clearing it. Apart from this, the number of people who could be considered really rich from the standards of the epoch was very scanty. There were no landlords and the majority of the people were well-to-do peasants or handicraftsmen, generally with lands of their own and ruled by local headmen of their own election.⁴⁴

It is not our intention to deal here with the relationship of this state of affairs with the spirituality inherited from the Vedic period, but it is obvious that it must have existed, given the well-known adherence of the Indian people to their most valued traditions. India, which, unlike other countries, looks often for inspiration to the past in order to solve the problems of the present, could find in the Vedic doctrine of the sacrifice a genuinely Indian formula to solve perhaps some of its socio-economical problems. But for that a revitalization of the liturgical spirituality would be necessary, similar to the one that took place in the case of the doctrine of "ahimsā", thanks to the political, social and religious movement of Gandhi and his followers.

Besides its individual and social functions one attributed also to the sacrifice what could be called a function relevant to the nation or the race. The same protective, defensive and even at times completely partisan function that the Israelites attribute to the predilection of Yahwe for their people is sometimes attributed by the Vedic Aryans to their liturgy, through the medium of the gods. Many are the texts making reference to it, for instance :

44. See T.W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, pp. 101-102,

1. 7. 10 *For your sake we call Indra away from other people. May he belong to us alone.*⁴⁵

4. 22. 9 *Give the enemies into our hands, (O Indra), so that they be easy to kill. Destroy the weapons of our mortal enemy.*⁴⁶

4. 32. 4 *Help us and only us.*⁴⁷

5. 4. 5 *Having smashed all the assailants, O Agni, bring to us the wealth of our foemen.*⁴⁸

The fact that these texts may not appeal to our modern sensibility does not mean that they are unimportant. On the contrary, to overlook them would be to overlook a momentous aspect of the universal causality, attributed by the Vedic Aryans to their liturgy.

Among the texts which throw better into relief the universal scope of the sacrifice the following are preeminent :-

4. 57. 4 *May the animals be happy, may men be happy.*⁴⁹

5. 31. 13 *May the mortals who were pleasant to you be even now pleasant. May they not fall in distress, O Immortal.*⁵⁰

1. 70. 6 *Protect these creatures, O Sapient one, you who know the generations of gods, and men.*⁵¹

1. 72. 6 *Protect the animals and all that stands and goes.*⁵²

1. 168. 1 *I wish I could turn you hither with the help of (my) songs for the welfare of both the worlds and their great advantage.*⁵³

Through the sacrifice man participates in the creation and maintenance of the world, since as an already quoted passage says *this sacrifice is indeed the navel of the world* (1.164.34)

The Brāhmaṇas can hardly be more explicit about that point. Thus the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, for instance, says :

45. "indram vo viśvatas pari havāmahe janebhyaḥ/asmākam astu kevalaḥ"

46. "...asmabhyaṁ vṛtrā suhanāni randhi jahi vadhar vanuṣo martyasya."

47. "...asmām—asmām id ud ava."

48. "...viśvā agne abhiyujō vihatyā śatrūyatām ā bhara bhojanāni."

49. "śunaṁ vābāḥ śunaṁ naraḥ..."

50. "ye cākananta cākananta nū te martā amṛta mo te ar̥ha āran."

51. "etā cikitvo bhūmā ni pāhi devānām janma martāmś ca vidvān."

52. "...paśūn ca sthātṛñ carathaṁ ca pāhi."

53. "ā vo 'rvācaḥ suvitāya rodasyor mahe vavṛtyām avase suvṛktibhiḥ."

4. 2. 4. 16 *The sacrifice that is being performed is Prajāpati from whom these creatures on earth have been born, and even now they are born after this sacrifice.*

5.6.3.2 *When he sacrifices, he sets free this all.*

This is the meaning of the so-called "vaisarjina" offerings of which the Brāhmaṇa speaks.

3.6.3.1 *He who consecrates himself consecrates himself for the sake of this all; for he consecrates himself for the sacrifice and this all results from the sacrifice; having prepared the sacrifice he now sets free (or produces) this all.*

3.6.2.26 *Those creatures which are not admitted to the sacrifice are forlorn... And thus whatsoever exists here on earth all that is admitted to the sacrifice. And verily both gods and men and the fathers drink together and this is their symposium; of old they drank together visibly, but now they do so unseen.*

About the feelings of joy and devotion accompanying such a symposium there are several allusions in the *R̥g Veda*; for example :

1.20.5 *Your rapturous joy, (O ancient sacrificers)⁵⁴, did get together with Indra accompanied by the Maruts and with the Ādityas, the kings.⁵⁵*

5.18.1 *Let Agni be glorified at dawn, he the much beloved guest of the clans, the immortal who delights in all oblations of the mortals.⁵⁶*

5.7.2 *Of whose presence (the presence of Agni) men rejoice everywhere at the sacrificial sessions.⁵⁷*

1.51.8 *In all these (deeds) of yours I have my joy at the festivals, (O Indra) !⁵⁸*

The sacrifice *qua* universal cause has necessarily to have all the mentioned functions, it being not possible to exclude any of them, although one might search for a special one in preference to the others. But even then, one knows that the

54. The verse speaks of the R̥bhus, a group of ancient sacrificers.

55. "saṁ vo madāso agmatendrena ca marutvatā ādityebhiḥ ca rājabhiḥ."

56. "prātar agniḥ purupriyo viśaḥ stavetātithiḥ/viśvāni yo amartyo havyā marteṣu ran̐yati."

57. "kutṛā cid yasya sam̐tau ran̐vā naro n̐ṣadane."

58. "viśvet tā te sadhamādeṣu cākana."

causality of the sacrifice cannot be restrained, that it necessarily extends far beyond the accomplishment of any special purpose. With this conviction in the heart a ṛṣi exclaims :

*Although you are indeed common to all, O Indra, yet we call upon you.*⁵⁹

The causality of the sacrifice is indeed so universal that it even includes the order of magic. That is what the scriptural image of Prajāpati or the sacrifice as father both of the devas and of the asuras renders clear beyond doubt. And yet the sacrifice is not a reality of a magical order, but of a sacramental order, since, as against what may be concluded on a first examination, the efficacy of the sacrifice is not simply *ex opere operato*. For there is no efficacy of the rites without the intervention of the divine priests, the gods, as we have already pointed out : *He without whom no sacrifice prospers, even of the wise man.*⁶⁰

There is nothing in the Vedic sacrifice that by itself warrants the efficacy of the rites, since even in the case of a ṛṣi, of a wise and holy man, the efficacy of his sacrificial formulae is always conditioned by the invisible intervention of the true Lord of the Word, of Brahmanaspati, as the text quoted above indicates. In a way the Vedic liturgy is far more removed from the *ex opere operato* of the magic than even the Christian liturgy, for unlike it, it does not count with the unconditioned assistance of the divine priesthood and it is besides constantly exposed in the eyes of the ṛṣis to dangers of discontinuity on one side as well as to secret attacks on the part of the forces of anṛta on the other.

It is difficult to decide what is magic and what is not, since there is no general agreement among the various authorities on the meaning of the word. But what can be certainly stated is that according to the Vedas the yajña is antonomastically the contrary of the magical practices of the yātudhānas, etc., and this not only on account of the mode of being of the powers invoked in both cults, devas or asuras, but also on

59 (4.32.13 and 8.63.7) "yac ciddhi śiśvaīām asindra sādharīṇas tvam/ tam tvā vayam havāmahe."

60. See Ch. II, note 48.

account of their different finality, which could be defined in one case as collaborating with the divine work of creation and redemption of the world and in the other as trying to obstruct it in one way or another. In the eyes of the Vedic ṛṣis the difference between their cult and that of the yātudhānas, etc., is as wide as the one that exists between the black and white magics of the Tibetan tradition, of which the life of Milarepa gives such a vivid account. It would be an arbitrariness coupled with intellectual dishonesty to accuse the Vedic liturgy of magic while trying to maintain the sacramental character of other liturgies more or less similar in meaning, like the Zoroastrian or the Christian ones, forgetting that all of them regard themselves as of divine institution and stress with the same emphasis the need of faith to obtain the fruits of the sacrifice. It is worthwhile noticing in this regard that according to the Brāhmaṇas the sacrifice without the "śraddhā" is sterile⁶¹ and contrariwise that if one sacrifices having the "śraddhā" the sacrifice is never really lost.⁶²

It is not our intention to compare here all these liturgies but only to warn the readers against the reduction, unfortunately of wide circulation, of the Vedic liturgy to some sort of magic or quasi magic. In our opinion the question needs an entirely new approach and awaits a different presentation.

The participation of man in the creation and conservation of the world by means of the sacrifice is connected with that ritual "return" to primordial time, which, according to M. Eliade, would be to some extent typical of all liturgies and even of all myth rehearsals.

As far as the Vedic liturgy is concerned the verse 3.31.9 describes concretely this tracing back of time as a conquest over it by means of the sacrifice :

*This sacrificial session of theirs is even now frequent, by which ṛta they wanted to conquer the months.*⁶³

Sāyaṇa, committing a pardonable anachronism, understands here under the "sadana" or *sacrificial session* of the

61. See *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.3.1.26, *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 2.6.10.1.

62. See *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* 7.4.

63. "...idaṁ cin nu sadanaṁ bhūry eṣāṁ yena mā-āṁ aśiṣāsan ṛtena."

Angiras the later "sattra". In our opinion, however, the present stanza has nothing to do with the "sattras" of the later period, the name of which is not even found in the *R̥g Veda*, but only makes allusion to a conquest of the months and through them of the Year similar to the one that is mentioned in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.10.1 in connection with the attainment of Brahman.

With the conquest of the time all relations are paradoxically inverted : from creature one becomes creator, from son father,—the father of one's own father, as 1.164.16 says :—

*Who knows this rightly becomes the father of his father.*⁶⁴

In the same sense can be interpreted 1.159.3 :—

*These skilful sons, performing mighty deeds, engendered the great parents straight away.*⁶⁵

What applies to men applies equally to the gods. Thus, the verse 1.69.2 says of Agni :—

*You became the father of the gods, though being their son,*⁶⁶ and 1.140.3 addresses him as *the furtherer of his father* (vardhanam pituh).

Mircea Eliade, speaking of the Indian symbolism of the abolition of time quotes a passage of the *Maitrī Upaniṣad*, which he comments in terms that fit perfectly well in our context :—

"What precedes the sun is timeless (akāla) and undivided (akala), but that which begins with the sun is time, that has parts (sakala) and its form is the year...."

The expression *what precedes the sun* could be understood on the cosmological plane as well as referring to the 'time' that preceded creation..., but it applies above all to the meta-physical and soteriological planes... The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (3.11) affirms indeed that for the Sage, for the Enlightened One, the Sun remains motionless. *But, after having risen to the zenith, it (the sun) will neither rise nor set anymore. It will stand alone in the centre...*

64. "...yas tā vijānāt sa pituḥ pitāsat."

65. "te sūnavaḥ śvapasaḥ sudāmsaso mahī jajñur mātārā pūrvacitaye..."

66. "...bhuvō devānām pitā putrah san."

It is well understood that the question here is of a sensible image of the transcendence : at the zenith, that is to say, at the summit of the heavenly vault, at the "centre of the world", there where the rupture of levels and the communication between the three cosmic zones becomes possible, the sun (=time) remains motionless for *the one who knows*; the "nunc fluens" is paradoxically transformed into "nunc stans". The illumination, the comprehension performs the miracle of the emancipation from time. The paradoxical instant of illumination is compared in the Vedic and Upaniṣadic texts to the lightning. Brahman is suddenly comprehended like flash of lightning (*Kena Upaniṣad* 4.4.5) *In the lightning, the truth* (*Kauṣṭhiki Upaniṣad* 4.2). It is known that the same image, lightning, spiritual illumination, is found in Greek metaphysics and in Christian mysticism.

Let us consider for a moment this mystic image : the zenith which is at one time the summit of the world and the center *par excellence*, the infinitesimal point through which passes the *cosmic axis* (axis mundi)...A center is the paradoxical place of the rupture of levels, the point where the sensible world can be transcended : But by the very fact of transcending the universe, the created world, one transcends time, the duration, and obtains the "stasis", the intemporal, eternal present.

The solidarity between the act of transcending the space and that of transcending the flux of time is well brought to light by a myth concerning the birth of the Buddha. The *Majjhima Nikāya* (III, p. 123) tells that the just born Bodhisattva places his feet flat on the ground and turning round to the North makes seven steps under a white parasol. He looks round all the regions and says with the roar of the bull : "I am the highest in the world, I am the oldest in the world."...

The "sapta padāni" or seven steps of the Buddha to the summit of the world have been represented in Buddhist art and iconography. The symbolism of the seven steps is fairly transparent. The expression *I am the highest in the world* (agga 'ham asmi lokassa) means the Buddha's transcendence of space. He has indeed attained the summit of the world (lokagga) by traversing the seven cosmic stages, to which correspond, as it is known,

the seven planetary heavens. But by this very fact he equally transcends time, for in the Indian cosmology the summit is the point from where creation started and it is also everywhere the oldest place. That is why the Buddha exclaims : *It is I who am the Eldest in the world* (jēṭṭho 'ham asmi lokassa). For, by attaining the cosmic summit the Buddha *becomes contemporary with the commencement of the world*...The irreversibility of cosmic time, terrible law for all those who live in illusion, does not count anymore for the Buddha...What we want to underline here is that the Buddha does not only become capable of abolishing time, but also that he can travel through it backwards ("paṭilomam", Skt. "pratilomam" : *against the fur*), and this will also hold good of the...yogis, who...proceed to a *return back*, which enables them to know previous existences..."⁶⁷

Connected with the question of retracing both time and space through the mystery of the cult seems to be the point of attaining youthfulness anew or keeping oneself steadily in it, or giving it back to others, in particular one's own parents. The link between these two aspects is shown by 3.5.7, where it is said that Agni after attaining the supreme bosom of ṛta, renovates his parents over and over again :—

*Agni has ascended to the fat womb that has a wide access, desiring the desirable.*⁶⁸ (There) he makes his parents new again and again.⁶⁹

In the light of this verse one understands better a series of other verses speaking of the same theme, in different contexts. For example,

1.20.4 *The R̥bhus made their parents youthful again by means of the sacrifice, they, the upright, whose mantras were effective.*⁷⁰

1. 110. 8 *You, the sons of Sudhanvan, made your gray-headed parents youthful (again) by means of the good work, O lords.*⁷¹

1. 111. 1 *For their parents the R̥bhus fashioned (again) the youthful age.*⁷²

67. M. Eliade, *Images et Symboles*, pp. 96-100.

68. Literally, *the desiring*, "uśantam".

69. "ā yonim agnir ghṛtavantam asthāt pṛthupragāṇam uśantam uśānaḥ/...punaḥ-punar mātaraḥ navyasi kaḥ."

70. "yuvānā pitarā punaḥ satyamantrā r̥jūyavaḥ/r̥bhavo viṣṭy akrata."

71. "...saudhanvanāsaḥ svapasyayā naro jivṛi yuvānā pitarākṛnotana."

72. "...takṣan pitr̥bhyām r̥bhavo yuvad vayas..."

1. 116. 10 *And you, O Nāsatyas, stripped from the old Cyavāna his bodily envelope, as it were a vesture.*⁷³

2 34.10 *Wonderful is considered the march of the Maruts⁷⁴, whether they milk as friends the udder of Pṛṣṇi (for us) or whether (they go) to Trita for the sake of (casting on him) the fault of the singer and the old age of the old, they the unassailable sons of Rudra.*⁷⁵

5.41.17 *May Nirṛti swallow my old age.*⁷⁶

7.63.6 *And this was for the old Cyavāna, the sacrificer, your reward, O Aśvins, that you bestowed on him a (new) shape as a help for the future.*⁷⁷

8 4.9 *Your friend, O Indra, is fair of form and rich in horses, carts and kine. He always remains in the age in which one possesses full strength. Radiant he approaches the assembly.*⁷⁸

Whether these verses merely speak of an internal, spiritual rejuvenation or also of the actual rejuvenation of the body, the old dream of mankind, is something difficult to decide. Whatever it is, this rejuvenation has definitely something to do with the possibility of retracing time thanks to the mystery of the cult.

The theme of the rejuvenation or at least of the prolongation of life by returning to the womb of all things constitutes one of the fundamental themes of Taoism. Among the methods used to this end that of the *embryonic breathing* (t'ai-si) which tries to imitate somehow the way of the breathing of the foetus in the womb of the mother, is pre-eminent. *By going back to the base, by returning to the origin, one casts away old age, and goes back to the foetal state*, says the T'ai-si K'ou

73. "jujuruṣo nāsatyota vavriṁ prāmuñcataṁ drāpim iva cyavānāt..."

74. Literally, *your march, O Maruts* (vaḥ marutaḥ yāma).

75. "citraṁ yad vo maruto yāma cekite pṛṣṇyā yad ūdhar apy āpayo duhuḥ/yad vā nide navamānasya rudriyās tritaiḥ jarāya juratām adābhyāḥ."

76. "...jarām cin me nirṛtir jagrasit."

77. "uta tyad vām jurate aśvinā bhūc cyavānāya pratityam havirde/adhi yad varpa itaūti dhatthaḥ."

78. "aśvī rathī surūpa id gomām id indra te sakhā/svātrabhājā vayasā sacate sadā candro yāti sabhān upa."

Kiue, a famous Taoist text.⁷⁹ As mircea Eliade says "this return to the womb, exalted both by the Taoist authors as well as Western alchemists, is but the development of an older and more wide-spread conception, already attested at archaic levels of culture : the healing by a symbolic return to the origins of the world, that is to say, by the re-enactment of the cosmogony. A number of archaic therapies imply a ritual reiteration of the creation of the world, which enables the patient to be born again and then to start anew his existence with an intact reserve of vital forces. The Taoists and the Chinese alchemists have retained and perfected this traditional method : instead of reserving it to the cure of various particular illnesses, they have above all applied it to cure man of the usury of time, that is to say, of old age and death."⁸⁰

It is worthwhile noting that it is merely as a periodical renovation of the body, whether material or subtle, that the Vedas envisage the problem of immortality and not as the acquisition of an eternally glorious body as in the Zoroastrian and Judaeo-Christian traditions. In the Vedas immortality consists in the capability of renovating one's own body, of freely projecting it in order to assume sacrificial functions, or, as one of the Upaniṣads says, in the capability of manifesting oneself freely in the three worlds, and not in the compulsion to be perpetually clothed in a body, however glorious it may be. In this connection the Vedas speak of the repeated births and deaths of the gods, the immortals *par excellence*, and of the periodical renovation of their exhausted bodies. Cf. the myths of Prajāpati, Agni etc. There being no existence in the Vedas of an immortality of the self or individuality proper, (which, as we shall see later, periodically merges in the Supreme Reality), there cannot be *a fortiori* a strict immortality of the body. The Vedic tradition does not promise an immortality of soul and body as the Zoroastrian does, but only a kind of immortality of the body, which really consists in the capability of assuming a body again and again. Bearing this in mind one begins to understand why Zoroastrianism says

79. See H. Maspero, "Les procédés de "Nourir le Principe vital" dans la religion taoïste ancienne. *Journal Asiatique*, 1937, p. 198.

80. M. Eliade, *Forgerons et Alchimistes*, pp. 124-125.

that, whereas the Haoma-rite of the Prophet bestows on the faithful the immortality of soul and body, the sacrifice of Yima, the first and foremost of the Daevayasniāns, can only bestow bodily immortality. In our opinion what is meant by this is that according to the Daevayasniāns, who represent the Iranian tradition closest to the Vedic thought, immortality had nothing to do with the persistence of the person, of the soul, but only with the persistence of the body, possibly by way of renewing it again and again thanks to the participation in the sacrifice of Yima (=Skt Yama), traditionally the first man and the institutor of the deva-cult.

Whatever it may be, it is abundantly clear that the Mazdayasniāns or Zoroastrians proper felt that there was an important difference of outlook between them and the Daevayasniāns concerning the question of immortality. And this difference is probably of the same order as the difference that exists between the Zoroastrian concept of immortality and the Vedic one.

The immortality promised in the Vedas to the sacrificers is like that of the devas, the divine *angels or messengers* (dūta), who as the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (3.6.1) says *neither eat nor drink, but they enjoy by seeing the nectar of immortality*. Their difference with respect to the angels of the Iranian and Judaeo-Christian traditions consists mainly in the fluidity of their forms, which unlike theirs change, says the Veda, like serpents or like the lightning. As a matter of fact their forms can be envisaged as transforming themselves constantly along their ascent and descent through the various planes of the universe⁸¹, to lose finally all name and form when assuming their secret and supreme essence within the bosom of the undifferentiated primordial reality. The way in which Jesus answers to the famous dilemma of the Saducees concerning the resurrection of the body (cf. *Matthew*, 22, 23-33) could suggest a similar conception, if we could overlook the fundamental tenets of the Judaeo-Christian theology.

Conscious of the transcendental importance of their

81. Cf. 1.161.5, 1.164.15, 1.164.29, 2.13 3, 3.48.4, 3.53 8, 5.15.4, 6.52.15, etc.

liturgy the Vedic Aryans love their sacrificial mission and promise themselves fidelity to it :

Taittirīya Saṃhitā 1.2.10 *May we not be severed from our service of the gods.*

7.46.4 *Let us have part, (O Rudra), in the sacrifice and in the sacred praise of the living.*⁸²

7.16.6 *Impel us and every priest to perform the rta, (O Agni) !*⁸³

2.10.6 *We want to speak like Manu, (O Agni), having you as messenger (of our words).*⁸⁴

3.33.8 *You should not forget this word, O singer, which future generations may hear from you.*⁸⁵

1.139.8 *The wondrous, immortal (word), which should resound for you anew in every generation, that (word) keep among us, and what is invincible, O Maruts, and what is invincible.*⁸⁶

2.30.7 *It (the work for Indra) has never blinded me, nor wearied, nor made drowsy. Let us never say : "Do not press Soma".*⁸⁷

5.46.1 *Like a horse I have joked myself-well knowing-to the pole. I seek neither release nor turning back again. May he who knows the way be my guide and lead me straight.*⁸⁸

The fundamental reason why the Vedic Aryans ask so often for progeny from the gods is in order to maintain without interruption the divine cult on earth, the importance of which is in their eyes invaluable :—

3.4.9 *And you, god Ivaṣṭṛ, release to us, liberal, the prolific*

82. "...ā no bhaja barhiṣi jivaśamse..."

83. "ā na ṛte śiṣiḥi viśvam ṛtvijam..."

84. "...tvādūtāso manuvad vadema..."

85. "etad vaco jaritar mīpi mṛṣṭhā ā yat te ghoṣān uttarā yugāni..."

86. "...yad vaś citraṁ yuge yuge navyaṁ ghoṣād amartyam/asmāsu tan maruto yac ca duṣṭaraṁ didhṛtā yac ca duṣṭaram."

87. na mā taman na śraman nota tandran na vocāma mā sunoteti somam..." Cf. Velankar's translation.

88. "haya na vidvāṁ ayuji svayaṁ dhuri.../nāsyā vaśmi vimucaṁ nāvṛtaṁ punar vidvān pathaḥ puraeta ṛju neṣati."

seed, from which may be born an energetic and judicious son, who may take the press-stones in his hand and love the gods.⁸⁹

6.8.5 Bestow upon the singers in every generation a (man) prominent in the holy synod, O Agni!⁹⁰

6.13.6 A mighty singer may be granted to us, O Son of Strength; give us a lasting posterity, full of vigour, O Agni!⁹¹

6.49.15 Now give us a protector of the great ṛta and a dwelling which does not decay, by means of which we may overpower the unbelievers, the godless rivals.⁹²

Afraid of the intrusion of non-Aryan practices among the Aryan tribes the ṛsis exclaim :

7.21.5 Let not the phallus-worshippers penetrate into our ṛta!⁹³

1.21.5 Let the Atris be childless!⁹⁴

6.62.8 The wrath of gods and man, which is accumulated for ages, O Heaven and Earth, make it an evil brand for him who is allied with the Rakṣas, O Ādityas, Vasus and Rudras!⁹⁵

If the non-Aryans can be identified with those who have chosen the cult of anṛta, (see 7.104.14),⁹⁶ the Aryans, men and gods, would be by implication those who worship the ṛta. That is what the following verses tell us in different ways :

4.3.9 With the ṛta I worship the immovable ṛta. From (this) cow (proceeds) the raw together with the sweet and ripe, O Agni. She,

89. "tan nas turīpaṃ adha poṣayitnu deva tvaṣṭar vi rarāṇaḥ syasva/ yato vīraḥ karmanyāḥ sudakṣo yuktagrāvā jāyate devakāmaḥ."

90. "yuge-yuge vidathyaṃ gr̥ṇadbhyo'gne...dhehi..."

91. "vadmā sūno sahaso no vihāyā agne tokaṃ tanayaṃ vāji no dāḥ..."

92. "nu no...maha ṛtasya gopam/kṣayaṃ dā'jīraṃ yena janānt spṛdho adevīr abhi ca kramāma..."

93. "...mā śiśnadevā api gur ṛtam nāḥ."

94. "...aprajāḥ santu atrīṇaḥ."

95. "yad rodasī pradivo asti bhūmā heḷo devānām uta martyatrā/ tad ādityā vasavo rudriyāso rakṣoyuje tapur aghaṃ dadhāta."

96. If I were one of those whose god is anṛta, or if I would conceive the false as gods, but why are you angry with us, O Agni? Those who tell lies should fall into your perdition.

"yadi vāham anṛtadeva āsa moghaṃ vā devān apyūhe agne/kim asmabhyaṃ jātavedo hṛṇīṣe droghavācas te nirṛtaṃ sacantām."

Cf. H. Lüders, *Varuṇa*, p. 420.

*though black, is brimming with the white nutriment and the "jāmarya" milk.*⁹⁷

2.9.3 *The womb from which you came forth, this is what I worship foremost, O Agni.*⁹⁸

In connection with this the *Atharva Veda* (18.4.36) speaks of the "pitṛs" as adoring in the highest heaven the inexhaustible source that springs from the back of the sea (salilasya pṛṣṭhe), undoubtedly the same as the "ṛtasya yoni" of other texts. On its part *Rg Veda* 1.185.5 depicts Heaven and Earth as meeting together in the supreme sphere and there *kissing the navel of the world* (abhijighrantī bhuvanasya nābhim), that is to say, the focal point from where everything starts and which, as we have already said, was located by the Vedic Aryans in the zenith.

All these quotations show us gods, pitṛs and men adoring each of them the same bosom of ṛta, the supreme source wherefrom everything proceeds, in compliance with the character of first principle which ṛta/yajña exhibits in the Veda.

One could summarize the contents of this long chapter by saying that in the eyes of the Vedic seers the liturgy on earth is the continuation of the heavenly liturgy, with a continuity however that denies both identity and difference.

This unity of the earthly liturgy with the heavenly one is parallel to the unity of the earthly sacrifice with itself through all time.

The unity however of all the sacrifices on earth does not imply the unity of wills of those who celebrate them, for, as 2.12.8 says, *two, having mounted the self-same chariot (=sacrifice), pray in opposite directions.*⁹⁹

To deeply understand the Vedic conception of the liturgy

97. "ṛtena ṛtaṁ niyatam īla ā gor āmā sacā madhumat pakvam agne/ kṛṣṇā satī ruśatā dhāsinaiṣā jāmaryeṇa payasā pīpāya."

The stanza could be paraphrased in this way : *By performing the sacrifice I worship the supreme ṛta, the motherly cow that is brimming with milk for the entire world.*

98. "...yasmād yoner udārithā yaje taṁ pra..."

99. "...samānam cid ratham ā tasthivāmsā nānā havetc..."

one has to bear clearly in mind the various functions that the Vedic Aryans attribute to it in relation to the individual, the society and the entire cosmos. The Vedic cult is not, as it is sometimes said, an individualistic cult, but a cult that bears all in mind, from the concrete individual to the totality of beings, for, as *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.6.2.26 says, *Whatsoever exists here on earth all that is admitted to the sacrifice.*

Conscious of the greatness of their sacrificial mission the Vedic Aryans promise themselves fidelity to it and are horrified at the mere thought of being unfaithful to it. In that sense too they deserve the title of "People of the Sacrifice" which we have given to them in another place.

CHAPTER IV

THE NATURALISTIC INTERPRETATION

In the second chapter we have defined the gods as powers of *ṛta*, after analyzing their multiple relations with the order of *ṛta*. This definition contrasts—it goes without saying—with the naturalistic interpretation which is commonly given of them. Let us comment on this contrast for a while.

In a way the naturalistic interpretation of many of the Western scholars finds a good support in the commentary of Sāyaṇa itself. Śrī Aurobindo has noted this point well. Says he : “More important (than the others) in this element of naturalistic interpretation (in Sāyaṇa’s commentary)...We have here the seeds of that naturalistic theory of the Veda to which European learning has given so wide an extension. The old Indian scholars did not use the same freedom or the same semantic minuteness in their speculations. Still this element in Sāyaṇa’s commentary is the true parent of the European Science of Comparative Mythology.”

“For Sāyaṇa Vṛtra is either simply the enemy or the physical cloud demon who holds back the waters and has to be pierced by the rain-giver.”¹

The fact that Sāyaṇa’s commentary may favour the naturalistic interpretation does not imply that the Veda would favour it too. Against what could be expected, the Veda offers rather scarce material to validate such an interpretation, unless one wants to read it between the lines.

Most of the passages adduced in support of the various naturalistic interpretations hardly prove anything, when closely scrutinized, and even the most commonplace assumptions scarcely find direct support in the Vedic text. Thus, for instance, despite the generalized assertion that the fire must have

1. Śrī Aurobindo, *On the Veda*, p. 22.

been originally worshipped on account of its physical power,² to my knowledge there is not a single place in the *Rg Veda* where this is explicitly said. The most that is stated of Agni is that he is praised on account of his beauty and glory,³ but this is not exactly the same as simply and purely divinising the fire.

The primitives do not divinize the elements, but they look at them as symbols of transcendent realities. Speaking about the veneration of iron among primitives, Eliade says the following : "Let us specify that it is not a matter of fetishism, of the adoration of an object in itself and by itself, in one word, of "superstition", but of sacred respect in regard of a *strange* object..., coming from "another side" (from the entrails of the earth, or from the vault of the sky, in the case of meteoric iron) and that it is therefore *a sign from the beyond*, an approximative image of the transcendence."⁴ Even in the cultures that know from of old the usage of the earthly iron the fabulous remembrance of the *celestial metal*, the meteoric iron, which was the first to be worked, persists often in an insistent way. The Beduins of the Sinai believe even at present that any one who would succeed in fashioning a sword with meteoric iron, would become invulnerable in battle and sure of knocking down his enemies.

Concerning the fire the situation is similar : an extremely complex symbolism associates it both with dreadful fiery theophanies and with the soft flames of the mystic love. At various levels, the light, the fire, the interior warmth express everywhere spiritual experiences, the sphere of the sacred, the divine proximity. The sacred fire of the Vedas is as far from being an idolatric divinisation of a natural element as the "primal warmth" of the Stoics, the "secret fire" of the alchemists,

2. "L'attribution au feu terrestre du caractère divin s'expliquerait déjà par la puissance effective de cet élément..." See A. Bergaigne *La Religion Védique*, vol. 1, p. 12.

3. See 2.8.3 *Who on account of his beauty (śrīyā) is extolled at eve and morning in every house, whose statute is inviolate.*

"ya u śrīyā dameṣv ā doṣaśasi praśasyate/yasya vrataṁ na mīyate."
Something quite similar is said of morning and night in 1.188.8.

4. M. Eliade, *Forgerons et Alchimistes*, p. 27.

or the "ever-living fire" of Heraclitus are. The fire or sun-god, invoked in so many religious contexts is a "representation collective", an archetype, which, as Jung points out,⁵ has close historical parallels, for instance with the Christ-figure of the Apocalypse or with the Buddha-Ādicca of the Pāli Canon.

So the naturalistic interpretation is far too simplistic.

Fortunately there seems to be a progressive reaction among Vedic scholars against a purely naturalistic interpretation of the Vedic gods and myths. Lüders, for example, does not hesitate emphatically to reject the naturalistic interpretation of Vṛtra's myth, despite its widespread acceptance at the time. Let us quote him :

"Formerly one always considered the myth of Vṛtra as a natural myth.

Whereas Oldenberg contents himself with seeing in the fight against Vṛtra the release of the earthly streams by the action of Indra, Hillebrandt has tried to give a climatological explanation of the myth. According to him the Indians had brought the legend of the fight against Vṛtra from Kashmir or from the North West, in any case from a country where the influence of Winter was far more noticeable than in India proper. Vṛtra is originally a Winter giant, who converts the waters into ice. The understanding of the Vṛtra-legend subsisted as long as the Indians were still living close to the great streams fed by the Himalayan snows, since those streams have precisely in Winter their lowest water level. At that time Vṛtra was also keeping the streams captured. Gradually however the meaning of the Vṛtra-legend gets lost and its meteorological point of departure is by no means necessarily present before the eyes of all the poets or even of their majority. Now if Vṛtra is a Winter giant—Hillebrandt goes on—, then his opponent, Indra, can only be the Sun-god, with whose ascending course begins the deliverance and progressive filling of the paralyzed streams.

In my opinion Hillebrandt's theory is not favoured precisely by the fact, which he has to acknowledge, that

5. G.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p. 51.

perhaps not even the majority of the poets continued to know the original meaning of the fight against Vṛtra.

The authors of these passages have obviously seen something else in the fight against Vṛtra...and since they are very numerous indeed...I would have liked that Hillebrandt had told us what in his opinion the fight against Vṛtra meant for these poets.

I consider it in fact impossible, that the Vedic poets, when they speak of mountains, would always mean clouds or that they should have always designated the downpours as rivers or as the seven rivers. Why should they have all the time employed metaphors and never the direct and unambiguous expressions? In my opinion, we will understand the Veda better, not only here, but also in many other cases, if we take it in a more literal sense.”⁶

It is surprising to see that as early as in 1912 Emile Durkheim already made tremendous criticisms concerning the naturalistic theory in his book *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. It is worthwhile transcribing some of his remarks:—

“(Naturism) makes religion a system of hallucinations, since it reduces it to an immense metaphor with no objective value. It is true that it gives religion a point of departure in reality, to wit, in the sensations which the phenomena of nature provoke in us, but by the bewitching action of language, this sensation is soon transformed into extravagant conceptions. Religious thought does not come in contact with reality, except to cover it at once with a thick veil which conceals its real forms: This veil is a tissue of fabulous beliefs which mythology brought forth. Thus the believer, like the delirious man, lives in a world peopled with beings and things which have only a verbal existence. Max Müller himself recognized this, for he regarded myth as the product of a disease of language...When trying to explain the immot nature of mythology, he says, *I call it a disease of language rather than of thought...After I had fully explained in my “Science of thought” that language and thought are inseparable, and that a disease of language is, therefore, the same thing as a disease of thought, no doubt ought to have remained as to what I meant...*

6. H.Lüders, *Varuṇa*, pp. 174-176.

Whatever we may do, if religion has as its principal object the expression of forces of nature, it is impossible to see in it anything more than a system of lying fictions, whose survival is incomprehensible.

Max Müller thought he escaped this objection, whose gravity he felt, by distinguishing radically between mythology and religion, and by putting the first outside the second. He claims the right of reserving the name of religion for only those beliefs which conform to the prescriptions of a sane moral system and a rational theology. The myths were parasitic growths which, under the influence of language, attached themselves upon these fundamental conceptions, and denatured them. Thus, the belief in Zeus was religious insofar as the Greeks considered him supreme God, father of humanity, protector of laws, avenger of crimes, etc., but all that which concerned the biography of Zeus, his marriages and his adventures, was only mythology.

But this distinction is arbitrary.

If the myth were withdrawn from religion it would be necessary to withdraw the rite also ; for the rites are generally addressed to definite personalities, who have a name, a character, determined attributes and a history and they vary according to the manner in which those personalities are conceived. The cult rendered to a divinity depends upon the character attributed to him ; and it is the myth which determines this character. Very frequently the rite is nothing more than the myth put in action...

All myths, even those which we find the most unreasonable, have been believed. Men have believed in them no less firmly than in their own sensations ; they have based their conduct upon them. In spite of appearances, it is therefore impossible that they should be without objective foundation...".⁷

The attempts made to discover the origins of religion by etymological analyses of the names of the gods, found in the Veda, the Avesta, Homer and the Edda brought Max Müller to the conclusion that myth was a "disease of language",

7. E. Durkheim, *The elementary forms of the Religious life*, pp. 99-102.

which while it "breaks out more fiercely during the early period of this history of human thought, it never disappears altogether." For it is, in fact, "the dark shadow which language throws upon thought, and which never disappears till language becomes entirely commensurate with thought, which it never will."⁸ However as Ernst Cassirer says, "to regard a fundamental human activity as a mere monstrosity, as a root of mental disease, can scarcely pass muster as an adequate interpretation of it."⁹ It only required to produce the anthropological data of peoples in a primitive state of culture to show the inadequacy of this philological hypothesis.

Much more capable of explaining things satisfactorily than the philological hypothesis, or even the anthropological approach and the functional attitude, is in our opinion the psychological interpretation of Jung, to which Eliade adheres in the main. In India an essentially psychological study of myths and rituals, sustained during milleniums of cross-cultural, non-sectarian, syncretic analysis, has yielded a number of clear well-defined orders of comparative interpretation, which confirm not in a small measure, the results of the present day analytical psychology in its application to the investigation of the nature of myth. But it is not our purpose to enter here into the complex question of the adhyātmic interpretation of the Śruti, which has its fundaments in the *Rg Veda* itself and which is amply developed in the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Upaniṣads*. We just want to show that the psychological interpretation of Jung is much more capable of properly explaining things than the long cherished naturalistic interpretation of Max Müller and his school.

For Jung myth and fairy tale are an expression of what he calls the archetypes, by which he understands primordial, universal images, corresponding more or less to the "representations collectives" of Lévy Bruhl. The characteristic of these archetypes is to be ambiguous, full of half-glimpsed

8. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Religion*, (1873), pp. 118 ff., 333 ff.; *Contributions to the Science of Mythology*, (1897), vol I, pp. 68f.

9. E. Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, (1945), p. 110.

meanings and endowed with an inexhaustible wealth of reference, which makes absolutely impossible any lateral formulation of them, so that to try to establish their singleness of meaning is to miss irremissibly the point.

According to Jung primitive man is often projecting these archetypal images into the objective world, because he has an imperative need to assimilate the outer experiences to inner psychic events. In that way he mythologizes the processes of nature which become symbolic expressions of the inner world of the psyche, projected and mirrored in the external events. The projection is so basic that it has taken sometimes thousands of years to separate it from the object, as in the case of astrology.

"As we all know" says Jung, "science began with the stars, and mankind discovered in them the dominants of the unconscious, the *gods* as well as the curious psychological qualities of the Zodiac : a complete projected theory of human character.

Astrology is a primordial experience similar to Alchemy. Such projections repeat themselves whenever man tries to explore an empty darkness and involuntarily fills it with living form."

"In the darkness of anything external to me I find, without recognising it as such, an interior or psychic life that is my own."

"I am therefore inclined to assume that the real root of alchemy (and so on) is to be sought less in philosophical doctrines than in the projections experienced by individual investigators."¹⁰

As if to confirm Jung's words an alchemist says : "There is in natural things a certain truth which cannot be seen with the outward eye, but it is perceived *by the mind alone* (*sola mente*). The philosophers have known it, and they have found that its power is so great as to work miracles."¹¹

Whatever the truth of this theory may be, it is certain that it finds more support in the Veda than the naturalistic

10. C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, p. 235.

11. C.G. Jung, *op cit.*, p. 256.

theory. As a matter of fact, the Śruti speaks on various occasions of numinous entities as appearing or manifesting themselves in physical elements. It is interesting to quote some of these passages. 1.145.1, for instance, tells us of the manifestation of Agni in the sacrificial fire in order to be interrogated.

*Ask him, he has come, he knows. As an expert is he approached, now is he approached. With him are the admonitions, with him the furtherances. He is the lord of booty. (the lord) of impetuous power.*¹²

A highly characteristic passage in this respect is found in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4.10-5.14 :

Upakośala Kāmalāyana dwelt as a brahmachārīn (religious student) in the house of Salyakāma Jābāla. He tended his fires for twelve years.

Then his wife said to him : "This student, who is quite exhausted (with austerities), has carefully tended your fires. Let not the fires themselves blame you, but teach him. The teacher however went away on a journey without having taught him.

The student from sorrow was not able to eat. Then the wife of the teacher said to him : "Student, eat. Why you do not eat ?" He said : "There are many desires in that man here, which lose themselves in different directions. I am full of sorrows and shall take no food".

Thereupon the fires said among themselves : "This student, who is quite exhausted, has carefully tended us. Well, let us teach him."

(Then they taught him the truth of Brahman, after what they all said :)

"Upakośala, this is our knowledge, our friend, and the knowledge of the Self, but the teacher will tell you the way (to realize it)."

In time his teacher came back and said to him : "Upakośala." He answered : "Sir". The teacher said : "Friend, your face shines like that of one who knows Brahman. Who has taught you ?"

"Who would teach me, Sir ?" He said. He denies, as it were.

12. "Tam prchatā sa jagāmā sa veda sa cikitvām iyate sā nv iyate/tasmint santi praśiṣas tasmint iṣṭayaḥ sa vājasya śavasah śuṣmīṣas patiḥ."

And he said: (pointing) to the fires: "Are these fires other than fires?"

The teacher said: "What, my friend, have these fires told you?"

(And) he answered: "This" (repeating the teaching of the fires).

In the life of Satyakāma Jābāla, the guru of Upakośala, there is a similar episode: Agni, Vāyu and Āditya the supreme devas of the three divine spheres appear to him in various forms and impart to him the doctrine of Brahman. Finally, Prāṇa, which probably stands here for the very Brahman, as in other passages, appears to him and completes his initiation. When he reaches his guru's house, the guru does nothing but repeat the same teaching that Agni, Vāyu, Āditya, Prāṇa had revealed to him:

Then he taught him the same knowledge. Nothing was left out, yea nothing was left out.

Gonda who has studied this point in his book *The Vision of the Vedic Poets* says the following:

"In all times and among many peoples there have been men, who were aware of the reality of visions and intuitions, of inspirations and sudden thoughts and ideas, men who understood that besides the purely sensuous impressions, a thought, a flash of intuition, in short, knowledge, may come to the human mind, as it were spontaneously, at least without any conscious activity of the organs of sensory perception and which leaves an impression of great reality; men who know that the doors of the mind may be opened (*Rg Veda* 9.10.6)."

"Dadu, in the twelfth century, would sit for hours in state of spiritual rapture, beholding the hidden light and feasting his soul on its ever expanding glories. Rāmakṛṣṇa for instance relates how many visions came to him: *When it was necessary to me, I could see a young sannyāsin coming out from my body. Exactly similar to me in appearance he was coming to teach me everything... Sometimes I used to see small lightspots, like a swarm of fireflies before my eyes... Not only the Divine Mother is without form, but She is also with form. It is possible to see Her forms... The Mother appears under different forms. Yesterday, I had a vision of*

Her...And She spoke to me."

"There are in the *R̥g Veda* some passages which put the belief in visual contact with the unseen beyond doubt, Gotama, the poet of 1.88, makes (str. 5) explicit mention of the well-known chariot of the Maruts which remained invisible when he perceived its owners secretly...In 5.61,1 ff. a similar adventure is related in connection with Śyāvāśva, who likewise met the Maruts face to face...*The Maruts appear to him all of a sudden as wondrous riders without horse and chariot and he recognises them only little by little.*

There can be no doubt whatever that the verb of seeing in passages such as 1.22.20 (etc.), refers to a preternormal and spiritual vision."¹³

Every fragment of the cosmos can give rise to a hierophany in compliance with the particular laws of the manifestation of the sacred. Any cosmic object can manifest itself at a given moment as a source of power, a guardian spirit, or a god : The sea, the rivers, the fire, the lightning, the sun, the moon, the blue sky, a mountain, the mist, the night, east, west, etc. Such is the case among the shamans and medicine men all over the world¹⁴, such is also the case in cultures, religiously speaking, much more developed and deep, like the Indian or the Tibetan. In Tibet, for example, the physical conditions seem to favour in a particular way this type of phenomena, according to what A. David Neel says :

"Just as the Chaldean herdsmen put the basis of Astronomy by observing the starry sky, in the same way the Tibetan hermits and errant shamans have since long ago meditated upon the mysteries of the strange region where they were living and noted the phenomena which found there a favourable ground."

13. J. Gonda, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, pp. 17, 27, 29.

Note—We have translated into English the passages that the author gives in French and German from *L'Enseignement de Ramakrishna* (collection : "Spiritualités Vivantes") and from Geldner's respectively. The two quotations appear in italics.

14. M. Eliade, *Shamanism, Archaic techniques of ecstasy*, p. 106.

"Translated by their primitive spirit their impressions take the fantastic forms of the phantoms with which they have peopled in such a dense way the great solitude of their empty land."¹⁵

For modern man it is extremely difficult to have a religious experience of the surrounding world. The maximum he is capable of is to have an aesthetical feeling with respect to it. But for the symbolic thought it is quite spontaneous not only to consider the world as a living reality, but also as a reality that transcends its own concreteness insofar as it is a sign and a receptacle of an impalpable world.

There was a time in which, according to Jung, the archetypal forms were "objects of inner perception, sensed as external phenomena—seen or heard...Thought was essentially revelation, not invented but forced upon us, bringing conviction by its immediacy and actuality."¹⁶

There are people in whom this faculty seems to persist to a certain extent for they are able to perceive numinous entities without any special effort or preparation on their side. This is, however, the exception. The rule is that one has to pass through a more or less long period of preparation, meditation, of intense aspiration and desire, as it is emphatically insisted upon in all initiatic traditions. We do not exactly know how were the Vedic precedents of the Upaniṣadic "dhyāna", but we know with certainty that these precedents existed, for mention is made of them in various passages. Thus, for example, 6.13.4 speaks of him who with the help of the songs and hymns obtains to kindle Agni from within himself, 4.2.6 of those who sweat and make hot their head for the sake of Agni. Another verse (1.186.11) speaks of the *meditation* (dīdhitiḥ) of the assembly which causes the gods to stay and it is like their very breath, another stanza (1.186.1) asks for the descent of the *meditative spirit* (manīṣā) to the earth, so that the assembly may enter into a rapturous mood. Etc.

Gonda, in his work *The Vision of the Vedic Poets* puts the Upaniṣadic concept of "dhyāna", in relationship with the Vedic concept of "dhīḥ" to which he consecrates a long study.

15. A. David-Neel, *Mistiques et Magiciens du Thibet*, p. 293.

16. C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p. 33.

“Dhīh” is on one side what grants the divine vision and on the other a divine gift.

It is not only the vision which matters, but also the sort of vision and the object of it. It is not one and the same to perceive a numinous entity as a source of power or as an organ of vision, as a power that works beyond natural phenomena or as a power of the divine Truth. The particular way in which the gods are envisaged in each tradition, is an exponent of the stage of development and perfection attained in that tradition, which represents both the continuation and the transformation of an immemorial religious past.

“Obviously”, says M. Eliade, “every religion that, after long processes of inner transformation, finally develops into an autonomous structure presents a *form* that is its own and that is accepted as such in the later history of humanity. But no religion is completely *new*, no religious message completely abolishes the past. Rather, there is a recasting, a renewal, a revalorization, an integration of the elements—the most essential elements—of an immemorial religious tradition.”¹⁷

The relative newness of the Vedic religion (in a way there is no absolute newness) consists in the fact, several times mentioned before, of presenting the gods as powers of *ṛta/yajña* and not just as powers that act behind the phenomena of nature. In connection with this the theophanies of which speaks the Veda have as a constant scenario the liturgical celebration and not merely the elements of nature as it often happens in the trance experiences of shamans and medicine-men. It is not without reason that the sacrifice is said to contain *par excellence* the multitude of gods. It is interesting to point out that even the manifestation of the gods in their own elements is generally framed in a liturgical scenario, as in the case of the two theophanies of Agni quoted above. The cult is the natural milieu for the Vedic theophanies in keeping with the essentially priestly character that the gods exhibit in the Śruti.

The following quotations are an exponent of what we are saying :

17. M. Eliade, *Shamanism, Archaic techniques of ecstasy*, pp. 11-12.

1.13.5 Strew in due order, O wise ones, the sacred grass dipped in ghee, where the immortal world appears.¹⁸

5.30.2 I asked others and they told me we could meet Indra if we are wakeful (that is to say, if we get up early to partake of the dawn sacrifice).¹⁹

1.139.2 When you, O Mitra and Varuṇa, took away from ṛta the anṛta²⁰ with the own zeal of Dakṣa, with his own zeal, then verily we saw in your seats the golden one, with the power of vision, in spirit, with the own eyes of Soma, with his own eyes.²¹

Although the Vedic doctrine of the devas is still to be deeply studied, as Ananda Coomaraswamy points out,²² I think that from the *status questionis* drawn up in these pages it is abundantly clear that the Vedic gods are far from being mere divinisations of natural forces, as the naturalistic interpretation takes them, and that our definition of them as powers of ṛta/yajña comes much closer to the truth.

Mythology is something much deeper than what the philological, anthropological and functional schools ever suspected, for its symbols touch the deepest centers of motivation of the human being, moving entire civilisations.

There is no human society in which mythical beliefs have not been rehearsed in liturgies, interpreted by mystics and theologians, magnified in art.

In spite of appearances the real chronicle of our species is not that of the progress of man, as *tool-maker*, as *homo faber*, but the history of the blazing visions of seers and prophets, who have inspired the life of millions of human beings.

18. "str̥ṇīta barhir ānuṣaḡ ghṛtapr̥ṣṭham maṇiṣiṇaḥ/yatrāmṛtasya cakṣaṇam."

19. "...apṛccham anyāṁ uta te ma āhur indraṁ naro bubudhānā aśema."

20. I take "ṛte" to mean here the cultural work from which Mitra and Varuṇa take out any shade of anṛta. I do not agree with the interpretation of the fragment given by J. Gonda in *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*.

21. "yad dha tyan mitrāvaruṇāv ṛtād adhy ādadāthe anṛtaṁ svena manyunā dakṣasya svena manyunā/yuvor itthādi sadmasv apaśyāma hiraṇyayam/dhībhiś cana manasā svebhir akṣabhiḥ somasya svebhir akṣabhiḥ."

22. A. Coomaraswamy, *A New Approach to the Vedas*, p. 64.

CHAPTER V

THE VEDIC IMAGE OF THE WORLD

Strictly speaking there is not one but several images of the world in the Śruti, the best known being perhaps that of the world conceived as an egg that breaks into two halves, one of silver representing the earth and the other of gold representing heaven.¹ However strange it may look, this image of the cosmic egg or the egg of the Brahman, so popular in the Purāṇas, is totally absent from the Vedas, which speak of the most of the world as *two moieties* (ubhāvardhau),² *two bowls* (dhiṣaṇe)³ or *two receptacles* (camvā)⁴ with opposed concavities.

Leaving out the mythological and cosmographical momentousness of these images, to be found a little everywhere,⁵ their doctrinal importance is minimal compared with the theological momentousness of an image such as the cosmic tree, which illumines in a marvellous way the most recondite corners of the doctrinal building of both Vedas and Upaniṣads, not less certainly than the tree of the cross does regarding the Christian message. It is not for nothing that one of the Upaniṣads calls this ancient tree the unique means for the knowledge

1. See *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.19. 1-2.

2. See 2.27.15.

3. See 10.44.8.

4. See 3.55.20.

5. Mircea Eliade (Images and Symbols, pp. 37-38) speaking of this point says the following : "In archaic and transitional societies, the surrounding world is conceived as a microcosm. At the limits of this closed world begins the domain of the unknown, of the formless. On this side there is ordered...space; on the other, outside this familiar space, there is the unknown and dangerous region of the demons, the ghosts, the dead and the foreigners. This image...has survived even in highly evolved civilisations such as those of China, Mesopotamia and Egypt."

of Brahman⁶. It is of this image that we want to speak here *in extenso* and it is for it that we do not hesitate to usurp the title of "Vedic image of the world," which in various degrees pertains also to the others.

To us the image of the cosmic tree, and also the correspondent images of the cosmic pillar, the world axis, the cosmic ladder or the cosmic mountain are primarily mythical and hardly owe their origin to any natural phenomenon. They correspond rather to what Jung calls "the trees and rocks and the waters of the psyche".⁷ They have been certainly projected into the external reality, but basically their nature is archetypal.

We will speak here of the image of the cosmic tree not from a comparative point of view but from a descriptive one, not because of outdated prides and prejudices, but because of the simple fact that not all the images of the cosmic tree equally serve to illumine the doctrinal body of the Śruti. The cosmic tree of the shaman or the tree of the cross which shed so much light on Shamanism and Christianity respectively, almost completely lose their power of illumination when taken out of their context and applied to a different system. That is not surprising for it is not just the type which is important but the specific traits of the image. That is the reason why in the Vedic tradition itself only *the Lord of trees* or "vanaspati" illumines in a global way the entire building of the Śruti and not the other mythical trees that are mentioned, which at best shed some light on particular corners of it.

The essential point concerning our "vanaspati" is that it is an inverted tree, with its root upwards and its branches downwards. Without this it would be incapable of adequately expressing the expansion of the unity into plurality according to the Vedic conception which places the supreme principle at the top of the world. The Eddic World Ash, Yggdrasil, with the World Eagle perched on its summit and the cosmic serpent

6. See *Maitrāyaṇa Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad* 6.4.

7. See C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p. 18.

gnawing at its root or the Cosmic Tree of the Maya-Aztec and Peruvian civilisations, depicted in almost the same terms, could not serve the purpose. And the same has to be said regarding the cosmic tree of Shamanism, which the Shamans are supposed to climb during their initiation in search of a nest for their mystical incubation.

The expression "ūrdhvamūla" which characterizes the cosmic tree according to *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.1 is essential to the Vedic conception of it. As Deussen says : "All who here take "mūla" in "ūrdhvamūla," as plural, and render *die Wurzeln*, *the roots*, *les racines*, etc, have failed to grasp the meaning of the comparison, which consists precisely in showing how from the one Brahman as root, the multiplicity of the phenomena of the universe arises. The universe therefore is likened to an *aśvattha* tree, in the case of which, like our own linden, from the one root the rich variety of its branches and shoots springs. The difference is that in the *aśvattha* which represents the universe the one root Brahman is above and the many shoots of its manifestation are here below on the earth."⁸

The oldest reference to the cosmic tree in an inverted position is found in 1.24.7. It says :—

*In the bottomless space King Varuṇa⁹ holds vertically the top of the tree, with unalloyed dexterity. Though sinking down its flames stand (at the same time) still ; high above is their bottom. May they sink deep within us!*¹⁰

The *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* 2.1.8.1 depicts this inverted tree as comprising both the first principle as well as the entire cosmos :—

All this was water. This water was the root, the world was the shoot. He is the father, earth, fire and air are the sons. Whatever belongs to the father belongs to the sons.

8. See P. Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads*, p. 203.

9. Varuṇa stands here for the Son of Waters or the supreme Fire as in *Vājasaneyi Saṁhitā* 10.7.

Sharers of joy are these majestic waters, inviolate, industrious, investing. In these as homes has Varuṇa made his dwelling, he, Child of Waters (apām śiśur), in the best of mothers.

10. "abudhne rājā varuṇo vanasyordhvaṁ stūpaṁ dadate pūṭadakṣaḥ/ nīcināḥ sthur upari budhna cṣām asme antar nihitāḥ ketavaḥ syuḥ."

The father of whom the text speaks can be taken as referring to Apām Napāt, the Son of Waters, whom various passages identify with Savitṛ, the supernal Sun and who, according to 2.35.8 is the trunk from which spread all the branches of creation¹¹. 10.149.2 describes him with the following words :

*Where the firmly fixed ocean welled out, the Son of the Waters, Savitṛ, knows it. From there sprang the earth, from there the upper region, from there heaven and earth expanded.*¹²

Before the remotest beginning of the world there were the primordial waters. From them the all developed itself, having the supreme Fire as seed :

*10.121.7 When the great waters came, bearing the all as germ, begetting Agni, from there originated the unique living spirit of the gods.*¹³

Bearing in mind the universal import of these images, which are beautifully expressed in the hymn to the Skambha in the *Atharva Veda* (10.7), one does not marvel at the descriptions of the Cosmic Tree given by the Upaniṣads in relation to the doctrine of Brahman. Here are, for instance, the words of *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.1:

There is that ancient tree whose root grows upward and whose branches grow downward. That is the Bright : Brahman. All worlds are contained in it.

The *Maitrāyaṇa Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad* (6.4) specifies further the intimate connection between the Cosmic Tree and the Brahman. They correspond to each other point by point :

The threefold Brahman has his root above, his branches are space, air, fire, water, earth and the other elements. "The single Fig Tree" is this Brahman called (and) it is its radiance, which became the sun. It is known as Om (aum it etat) and it belongs to the Imperishable...Furthermore, it is the only basis for the knowledge of Brahman. (asya ekaḥ sambodhayitā iti).

11. *The other beings propagate themselves as branches of him.*

"...vayā id anyā bhuvanāni asya pra jāyante..."

12. "yatrā samudraḥ skabhito vy aunad apām napāt savitā tasya veda/ato bhūr ata ā utthitām rajo'to dyāvāpṛthivi aprathetām."

13. "āpo ha yad bṛhatir viśvam āyan garbham dadhānā janayantir agniṁ/ tato devānām sam avartatāsur ekaḥ..."

The captivating power of these images cannot be denied. As Jung says, "they are created out of the primal stuff or revelation and reflect the ever unique experience of Divinity."¹⁴

Just as through the famous ladder of Jacob were ascending and descending the angels, thus also the cosmic tree of the Vedas represents a path which can be travelled over in both directions.

With reference to this point the Vedic Lord of Trees performs the same function as the cosmic trees, pillars or ladders of various traditions.

The symbolism of the ascension into heaven by means of a tree or a post, which represents the Cosmic Tree or Pillar is common among the Shamans of Siberia. It is thus, for instance, that the Altaic Shamans use for this purpose a young birch, stripped of its lower branches, with seven, nine or twelve footholds contrived on its trunk, which stand for the different heavens or celestial planes. The birch on its part is an image of the Cosmic Tree. After having sacrificed a horse the Shaman symbolically ascends the heavens, availing himself of the notches contrived on the birch tree and, on reaching the ninth heaven, he prostrates himself before Bai Ulgân, the supreme God, to whom he offers the soul of the sacrificed horse.

The same symbolism is found in the initiation ceremony of the Buriat Shamans, where instead of a birch the candidate climbs up a post in the middle of the yurt which is also a replica of the Cosmic Tree, that is found in the centre of the World, with the Pole star shining above it.

We need not here insist upon the ascensional symbolism of Christian mysticism, in which the Ladder of the Paradise plays an important role.

As far as the Vanaspati is concerned it is, as we have said, a two-way path. To begin with, the gods come down through it. That is, I think, the meaning of 3.8.9 where it is said that once the sacrificial posts, mysteriously descended from heaven, are raised up, the gods enter the divine paths, namely

14. C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p. 8.

the sacrificial posts themselves, symbols of the cosmic tree. Let us quote the stanza once more.

*Like swans advancing in rows the sacrificial posts have come to us dressed in white, (and) while they are raised up towards the East (or in front) by the seers, the gods enter the divine paths.*¹⁵

Not only the gods, but the pitṛs also are represented as coming down from heaven through the cosmic tree. Thus, 7.33.9 speaking of the Vasiṣṭhas says :

*They penetrate, with the inner light of the heart, into the thousand times ramified secret.*¹⁶

The secret with thousand branches is, as Ludwig also (1.24.7) says, the mystic tree sustained by Varuṇa in the baseless region and not the "saṃsāra", as Sāyaṇa thinks, committing a patent anachronism. We will return to this latter.

If gods and pitṛs come down through the cosmic tree, men, on their part, are described as ascending through it to the sacrificial regions.

"The installation and consecration of the sacrificial post", says Mircea Eliade, "constitutes a rite of the centre. Assimilated to the cosmic tree the stake becomes in its turn the axis connecting the three cosmic regions. Communication between heaven and earth becomes possible by means of this pillar. He who makes the sacrifices does, indeed, go up to heaven, alone or with his wife, upon this post now ritually transformed into the World Axis itself".¹⁷

In truth says the Taittirīya Saṃhitā (6.6.4.2), the sacrificer makes himself a ladder and a bridge to reach the celestial world.

Already the *Rg Veda* (3.53.20) says :

*Let not this tree abandon us or injure us. (Bring us) safe to our home, to the removal of bonds, to the release.*¹⁸

According to 1.135.8 those who have climbed victoriously

15 "haṃ ā iva śreṇīṣṭo yātī ā" śīkrī vaśānāḥ svaravo na āguḥ/un nīya-mānāḥ kavibhiḥ purastād devā devānām api yanti pāthah."

16 "ta in. nīyaṃ hṛdayasya praketaiḥ sahasravaḥsam abhi saṃ caranti..."

17 M. Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, p. 45.

18 "āyam asmān vanaspatir mā ca hā mā ca rīriṣat/svasty ā gr̥hebhya āvasā ā vimocanāt."

the tree (in Sāyaṇa's opinion the sacrificers) should not forget to come back and assist the others :

*Those who stepped as conquerors into the Aśvattha Tree, may those conquerors be with us.*¹⁹

However, to step into the tree is not an easy matter and difficulties may present themselves also when trying to come out of it, as it is narrated of the ṛṣi Saptavadhri, who finding himself caught inside the tree implored the help of the Aśvins, according to the episode narrated in 5.78.5-6 almost in a pathetic way :—

Open yourself, O Tree, like the womb of a woman who has to deliver.

*For the frightened ṛṣi Saptavadhri, who was imploring help, you made open and close the Tree (like a womb), by means of your māyā, O Aśvins!*²⁰

The mystical character of the ascension of the Cosmic Tree is marvellously thrown into relief by these words of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (1.4.3) :—

May I enter into you, O treasure ! You, O treasure, enter into me ! In you, consisting of a thousand branches, I am cleansed. You are a refuge. Enlighten me ! Take possession of me !

The Lord of Trees is not only a path for gods and men to travel, but also a means of conveyance of men's sacrifices on one side, and of the gifts of heaven on the other. In this regard the Vanaspati is not only depicted as yielding nectar among prayers (9.12.7; see 1.90.8) or showering down soma (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.5.3), but also as conveying the oblations to the gods :—

1.142.11 *Hand over (the offerings), O Tree, sacrifice yourself to the gods.*²¹

5.5.10 *Where as you know, O Tree, are the secret names of the gods, there bring the offerings.*²²

19. "...yam aśvattham upa'isthanta jāyavo 'sme te santu jāyavaḥ "

20. "vi jihīṣva vanaspatē yoniḥ sūṣyantyā iva..."

"bhītāya nādhāmānāya ṛṣaye saptavadhṛaye/māyābhir aśvinā yuvam vṛkṣam śam ca vi cācathaḥ."

21. "avsrjann upa tmanā devān yakṣi vanaspatē..."

22. "yatra vettha vanaspatē devānām guhyā nāmāni / tatra havyāni gamaya."

Bearing in mind the internal dynamism of the cosmic tree one feels tempted to refer to it the cosmic ascent and descent of the waters, the fire, etc., even where its instrumentality is not explicitly mentioned, as in the following cases :—

1.164.31 *I saw the shepherd going through the paths up and down, without taking rest. He clothes himself in (the waters), that run in the same and in the opposite direction and travels continuously within the worlds.*²³

1.164.47 *Through a black path the golden birds fly up to heaven, clothing themselves in the waters. Again descend they from the seat of ṛta and the whole earth is moistened with fatness.*²⁴

1.164.51 *This same water ascends and descends in the course of the days.*²⁵

1.35.3 *The god (Savitṛ) goes by a downward, he goes by an upward path.*²⁶

3.2.10 *He (Agni) moves up and down, working. He lays down his germ within these worlds.*²⁷

3.9.2 *When you enter in your mothers, the waters, do not forget, O Agni, the return and that you, staying in the distance, were (formerly) here.*²⁸

3.53.5 *Go forth, Maghavan, and come again, Indra, brother; in both places you have a goal.*²⁹

5.15.4 *When you, spreading fourth, cherish everyone like a*

23. "apaśyam gopām anipadyamānam ā ca parā ca pathibhiś carantam/ sa sadhriciḥ sa viśūcīr vasāna ā varīvartī bhuvaneṣv antaḥ"

24. "kṛṣṇam niyānam harayaḥ suparṇā apo vasānā divam ut patanti/ta āvavṛtrant sadanād ṛtasyād id ghṛteṇa pṛthivī vy udyate."

25. "samānam etad udakam uc caity ava cāhabhiḥ..."

26. "yāti devaḥ pravatā yāty udvatā..."

27. "...sa udvato nivato yāti vevīṣat sa garbham eṣu bhuvaneṣu didharat."

28. "...tvam yan mātṛ ajagann apaḥ/na tat te agne pramṛṣe nivartanam yad dūre sann ihābhavaḥ."

29. "parā yāhi maghavann ā ca yāhīndra bhrātar ubhayatrā te artham..."

mother, so that he may enjoy and see, (or) when you, always putting on new vital force, grow big, (O Agni), then by your own steam you start going round under different shapes.³⁰

5.47.3 *The bull, the ocean, the red eagle entered into the bosom of the primordial father and stepped out (again) as the colourful stone that is placed in the sky.*³¹

The special structure of the Lord of Trees and the internal dynamism characterizing it are suggestive of several interesting points, which are worth being discussed.

In the first place, given the ramified structure of the Cosmic Tree, the descent through it of the fire, the waters, etc. represents a process of separation, of dispersion, while their ascent through it implies a process of reunion, of unification. By this light the numerous Vedic texts speaking of separation and reunion acquire a particular significance. Here are some of them.

(a)

1.164.36 *Seven half-embryos are busy distributing the seed of the world, according to Viṣṇu's instruction.*³²

2.24.14 *The zeal of Brahmanaspāti came true, as desired, when he wanted to perform the Great Work. He drove out the cows and distributed them from heaven. Mighty like a great stream (the herd) parted in different directions.*³³

2.28.4 *The Son of Aditi, sent them off, while dividing them, (thereafter) the rivers of Varuṇa attain the ṛta*³⁴. *They neither become tired nor try to get free. Swift like birds they fly in their circular course.*³⁵

30. "māteva yad bharasē paprathāno janām janām dhāyase cakṣase ca/ vayovayo jarase yad dadhānaḥ pari tmanā viṣurūpo jigāsi."

31. "ukṣā samudro aruṣaḥ suparnaḥ pūrvasya yonim pitur ā viveśa/ madhye divo nihitaḥ pṛṇir aśmā vi cakrame..."

32. "saptārdhagarbhā bhuvanasya reto viṣṇos tiṣṭhanti pradiśā vidhar- mañi..."

33. "brahmanaspater abhavad yathāvaśaṁ satyo manyur mahi karmā kariṣyataḥ/yo gā udājat sa dive vi cābhajan mahīva ritiḥ śavasāsarāt pṛthak "

34. The rivers of Varuṇa attain in their descent the earthly ṛta, which they further.

35. "pra sim ādityo asṛjad vidhartām ṛtām sindhavo varuṇasya yanti/na śrāmyanti na vimucanty etc vayo na paptū raghuyā pariṇman."

3.1.9 *He found just born the udder of the father and sent off its streams, the cows, (all around).³⁶*

(b)

5.6.1-2. *I think of this Agni, the Vasu, the home to which the kine return and the swift racers, the home to which the very victors go back.*

This is Agni, the one who is praised as good, around whom the kine and the fleet horses assemble and also the well-born sacrificers.³⁷

2.13.2 *They run towards the common goal, bearing with them their milk; to the all-nourishing they bring nourishment. One and the same is the path of the streams, when they flow into (the sea).³⁸*

3.30.5 *Even these two boundless worlds are but a handful for you, Indra, when you grasp them, O maghavan.³⁹*

(c)

2.24.9 *He is the one who gathers together and the one who separates, the purohita (of the gods), highly praised in combats under the name of Brahmanaspati.⁴⁰*

2.35.3 *While some meet together, some go sideways; the streams fill the common receptacle. Him, the pure, the shining Son of Waters, the pure waters stand around.⁴¹*

9.84.2 *The immortal who has climbed up the worlds, Soma, flows then around them all, effecting both union and separation. For aid follows them Indu, like Sūrya the Dawns.⁴²*

36. "pituś cid ūdhar jan aśā viveda vy asya dhārā asṛjad vi dhenāḥ..."

37. "agnim taṁ manye yo vasur astam yaṁ yanti dhenavaḥ/astam arvanta āśavo taṁ nityāso vājina..."

"so agnir yo vasur gr̥ṇe saṁ yam āyanti dhenavaḥ/saṁ arvanto raghudruvaḥ saṁ sujātāsaḥ sūraya..."

38. "sadhṛim ā yanti pari bibhratiḥ payo viśvapsnyāya pra bharanta bhojanam/samāno adhvā pravatām anuṣyade..."

39. "...ime cid indra rodasi apāre yat saṁgrbhṇā maghavan kāśir it te."

40. "sa samnayaḥ sa vinayaḥ purchitaḥ sa suṣṭutaḥ sa yudhi brahmanaspatiḥ..."

41. "sam anyā yanty upa yanty anyāḥ samānam ūrvaṁ nadiāḥ pṛṇanti/ tam ū śuciṁ śucayo dīdivāmsam apāṁ napātāṁ pari tasthur āpaḥ."

42. "ā yas tasthau bhuvanāny amartyo viśvāni somaḥ pari tāny arṣati/ kṛṇvant saṁcṛtaṁ vicṛtaṁ abhiṣṭaya induḥ siṣakty uṣasaṁ na sūryaḥ."

Aitareya Āraṇyaka 3.2.3.7 What we call the Great Person is the Year, which causes some beings to fall together and causes others to grow up. Its essence is Yonder Son.

Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 4.11 : If a man has discerned him, who being one only, rules over every germ (cause), in whom all this comes together and comes asunder again, who is the lord, the bestower of blessing, the adorable god, then he passes for ever into that peace.

The structure and the internal dynamism of the cosmic tree does not only illumine with a particular light the cosmic processes of separation and reunion, to which we have just alluded, but also the apparent antinomy of the one god begetting the many gods⁴³ and of the many gods begetting the one god⁴⁴, to which the Vedas make allusion repeatedly. While in

43. See for instance,

1.161.10 *Three mothers, three fathers bears the one and yet stands there erect. They do not make him weary.*

“tisro mātṛs trīn pitṛn bibhṛad eka ūrdhvas tasthau nem ava glāpanti...”

1.161.11 *The wheel of ṛta revolves continuously in the sky with its twelve spokes, without danger of wearing off. Thereon stand, O Agni, the sons in pairs, seven hundred and twenty.*

“dvādaśāraṁ nahi taj jarāya varvati cakraṁ pari dyām ṛtasya/ā putrā agne mithunāso atra sapta śatāni viṁśatī ca tasthuh.”

3.1.12 *Like a supporting pillar (?) in the confluence of the great waters is the radiant father, that the son wishes to see, the one who generated the cows, the manliest son of the waters, the swift Agni.*

“akro na babhriḥ samithe mahinām didṛkṣeyaḥ sūnave bhāṛjikaḥ/ud usriyā janitā yo jajānāpām garbho nrtamo yahvo agnih.”

4.1.12 *First he gave wondrously rise to the (divine) troop, in the bosom of ṛta, in the nest of the bull, he, the longed for, the youthful, the stately, the radiant. Seven beloved (sons) were born to the bull.*

“pra śardha āṛta prathamam vipanyam ṛtasya yonā vṛṣabhasya nile/spārho yuvā vapuṣyo vibhāvā sapta priyāso janayanta vṛṣṇe.”

44. See for instance,

2.13.5 *The gods have engendered you, the god, with their lauds, like the steed (that is begotten) by the waters. Meet for praise are you.*

“...taṁ tvā stomebhīr udabhir na vājinaṁ devaṁ devā ajanant sāsy ukthyaḥ.”

the downward direction the one gives rise to the many, in the upward direction the many give rise to the one. The passing from unity to multiplicity, which, as we have seen, is pointed out by the particular structure of the Lord of Trees, is not a final step, but is followed by the inverse passing from multiplicity to unity. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (6.1.2.26) makes this point extremely clear, when it says :—

And inasmuch as he (Prajāpati) created the gods, thereby he is the father of the gods; and inasmuch as the gods restored him, thereby the gods are his fathers.

By the light of this text a number of passages concerning the complex question of the births of the gods in the Vedas are clarified in a considerable manner. But this is a merely general clarification, which cannot rule out the examining, one by one, of the various divine births mentioned in the Vedas, obviously a matter into which we cannot here enter into in detail. Of one thing however, we are totally sure, that the result of this investigation will not contradict what the image of the cosmic tree with its variants reveals to us concerning the mode of being of the spiritual world according to the Vedas.

The Cosmic processes of separation and reunion which are but other names for creation and destruction and in another sense redemption, are not only illustrated by the Vedic image of the inverted tree, but also by the later myth of Puruṣa/Prajāpati. In our opinion the entire myth of Prajāpati, which the last quotation has just introduced to us, does not

3.49.1 *Praise the great Indra, whom the two worlds and the gods engendered as a masterly hammer of the enemies.*

“samsā mahām indram...yam...dhiṣaṇe vibhvataṣṭam ghanam vṛtrā-
nām janayanta devāḥ.”

7.62.1 *Sūrya has raised high up his rays. With wisdom was he made, really well-made, by the creators.*

“ut sūryo bṛhad arcīṁśy aśret...kratvā kṛtaḥ sukṛtaḥ kartṛbhir
bhūt.”

7.62.4. *O Heaven and Earth, O Aditi, protect us and also the good creators who have engendered you both, O Exalted ones !*

“dyāvābhūmī adite trāsīthā n no ye vām jajñuḥ sujanimāna ṛṣve...”

represent but an alternative form of envisaging the mystery of separation and reunion which is indicated in the first place by the structure and the internal dynamism of the cosmic tree. It is really extraordinary how the image of the Vanaspati illumines and gives cogency to the most central conceptions of the Vedic theology. This is one of the ways in which it fully deserves the title of *illuminer* (*sambodhayitā*) of the sacred word or Brahman, conferred to it by the *Maitrāyaṇa Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad* (6.4). In a way all the theological formulations of the Śruti could be considered as alternative formulations of it, at least those referring to what the tradition styles as “*parā vidyā*.”

As it is known there are in the Śruti several accounts of the myth of Prajāpati, sometimes with variants apparently difficult to reconcile. One of the most representative is found in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 7.1.2.1-11. In general lines it describes how Prajāpati dismembering himself creates the world and exhausts himself thereby. The gods, seeing that without him there is no foundation whatsoever decide to restore him and ask this for the collaboration of Agni, indispensable in the Vedic conception to any sacrificial action, either of man or of the gods. By means of Agni therefore the gods give back the vital force to Prajāpati and completely restore his body.

Perhaps the most concise form in which the myth is related is found in *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* 3,2.6.2 :

Prajāpati, the year, after having sent forth all creatures, burst. He put himself together again by means of the chandas (the Vedas).

The fundamental idea in all the various formulations of the myth is that Prajāpati is dismembered and recomposed⁴⁵. The *R̥g Veda* clearly alludes to the first part of the myth of Prajāpati, that is to say, to his dismemberment in the hymn of the Puruṣa, the ninetieth of the tenth maṇḍala.

Puruṣa is the being born in the beginning (v.7), that is to say, the first of the born ones. With him as victim the

45. To us this cyclic process is not just a mythical vesture in which the Vedic seers were simply wrapping the cyclic processes of nature, as it is often pointed out.

gods offer a sacrifice (vv. 6.7), and from his dismemberment comes out the universe with its different parts (vv. 8-10).

A series of verses scattered here and there in the *R̥g Veda* possibly allude to the same myth or to variants of it. For instance.

10.130.3 *What was the measure and the model, what was the basis, when all the gods sacrificed the (first) god?*⁴⁶

4.37.8 *O Vājas, R̥bhukṣaṇ, Indra, Nāsatyas, bring to us, men, that treasure, the horse. Slaughter it for the sake of an abundant distribution of gifts (maghattaye puru ā śasta)*⁴⁷

7.40.1 *When God Savitṛ will grant it today may we be present in the distribution of him (namely Savitṛ himself) who is endowed with riches.*⁴⁸

1.70.10 *All bring to our sun the tribute Men honour you in many places, they divide (you) like (the sons) the possessions of the grayheaded father.*⁴⁹

1.68.4 *All of them*⁵⁰ *divided among themselves the divinity, namely ṛta, worshipping the immortal world as usual.*⁵¹

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* interprets the traditional image of the spreading of the sacrifice like a web in the same sense, for it says : *They slay the sacrifice when they spread it.*⁵² In this it just follows the conception of the *Puruṣa Sūkta* itself, which associates in several places the idea of spreading the sacrifice with the idea of the creative immolation. The association, however, does not seem to be very ancient.

46. "kāsīt pramā praimā, kim nidānam...yad devā devam ayajanta viśve."

47. "taṁ no vājā ṛbhukṣaṇa indra nāsatyā rayim/sam aśvaṁ carṣaṇibhya ā puru śasta maghattaye."

48. "yad adya devaḥ savitā suvāti syāmāsyā ratnino vibhāge."

In our opinion the verse refers to the distribution of Savitṛ as the object of distribution and not as the subject that distributes. In favour of our interpretation there is the fact that "vibhāga" refers everywhere in the *R̥g Veda* to the distribution of objects, for instance, treasures (1.109.5), goods (7.37.3), food (5.77.4)...

49. "...bharanta viśve baliṁ svar naḥ/vi tvā naraḥ purutrā saparyan pitur na jivrer vi vedo bharanta."

50. According to Sāyaṇa the sacrificers.

51. "...bhajanta viśve devatvaṁ nāma ṛtaṁ sapanto amṛtam evaiḥ."

52. See *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.3.4.1,

Although the restoration of the Divine Being is not mentioned in the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, which speaks only of his creative immolation, the idea is not absent in our opinion from the *R̥g Veda*. To us it is clear that it is alluded to in the numerous passages depicting the gods and the entire world as handing themselves over to Indra in order to defeat the obstacles (*Vṛtra*) which prevent the perfect attainment and fruition of the divine light and waters. See some of the relevant passages :

6.25.8 *All was given completely to you by the gods in the fight against Vṛtra, in the annihilating combat, all lordly power and might, O adorable Indra*⁵³.

8.3.6 *To Indra have all the worlds given themselves.*⁵⁴

3.51.5 *A rich tribute is due to him among the mortals, many goods bears the earth (for him) For Indra the heavens, the plants and the waters, the rivers and the forests keep their wealth.*⁵⁵

7.21.7 *Even the old gods submitted their powers to you for the divine dominion*⁵⁶.

4.19.2 *The gods resigned as if they were old people ; you, Indra, became the king of all, you who have the truth as womb.*⁵⁷

The consequence is what 6.47.27 says :

*From Heaven and Earth was taken away the force, from the trees was extracted the strength.*⁵⁸

In consequence Indra fights practically alone against *Vṛtra* :

4.19.1 *Thus, O thunder-wielding Indra, all the gods and both the worlds, chose you, the great, as the single fighter against Vṛtra.*⁵⁹

53. "...satrā te viśvam anu vṛtrahatyē/anu kṣatram anu maho yajatrendra devebhir anu te nṛṣahye."

54. "...indre ha viśvā bhuvanāni yemire..."

55. "pūrvīr asya niṣṣidho martyeṣu puru vasūni pṛthivī bībharti/indrāya dyāva oṣadhīr nṛtāpo rayīm rakṣanti jīrayo vanāni."

56. "devās cit te asuryāya pūrve 'nu kṣatrāya mamire sahāṁsi..."

57. "avāsrjanta jivrayo na devā bhuvah samrāḥ indra satyayoniḥ..."

58. "divas pṛthivyāḥ pary oja udbhṛtaḥ vanaspatibhyaḥ pary ābhṛtaḥ sahaḥ..."

59. "evā tvām indra vajrinn atra viśve devāsaḥ.../mahām ubhe rodasi... nir ekam id vṛnate vṛtrahatyē."

4.17.19 Praised is the liberal Indra, because he alone kills the many irresistible foes.⁶⁰

According to Geldner's interpretation of 1.165.6 the gods would even lose their *autonomous existence* (Selbständigkeit), by the fact of resigning their power to Indra and leaving him alone in the fight against Vṛtra. The English translation of his German rendering would read as follow :

*Where was then this your separate existence, O Maruts, when you left me alone in the fight against the dragon.*⁶¹

That our way of understanding these verses is in agreement with the tradition is made evident by the concrete manner in which this doctrinal point is interpreted, for instance, in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 3.4.2.1-16 :

When the gods had performed the guest-offering, discord befell them. They separated into four different parties, unwilling to yield to each other's excellence.. When they were separated, the Asura/Rakṣas came after them and entered between them.

They became aware of it, "Forsooth, we are in an evil plight... We shall fall a prey to our enemies. Let us come to an agreement and yield to the excellence of one of us." They yielded to the excellence of Indra, wherefore it is said : "Indra is all deities, the gods have Indra for their chief"...

The gods laid down together their favourite forms and desirable powers one after another, and said : "Thereby he shall be away from us, he shall be scattered to the winds, whosoever shall transgress this (covenant) of ours."

Now those favourite forms and desirable powers which the gods put together, they then deposited in Indra; Indra verily is he that burns yonder (the Supernal Sun); but he indeed did not burn in the beginning, but as now everything else is dark, so was he then ; and it is by that very energy (derived from those divine objects) that he burns.

The relation between the myths of Indra and Prajāpati is further illustrated by the following words of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (12.8.1.1) :—

Now, when Indra's energies or vital powers, departed from him,

60. "stuta indro maghavā yaddha vṛtrā bhūrīṇy eko apratīni hanti..."

61. "kva syā vo marut.ḥ svadhāsīd yan mām ekaṁ samadhātāhihatye..."

the gods restored them by means of this very sacrifice. (See also *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* 21.7.1.7).

The restoration of Prajāpati by the gods, which according to *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 6.1.2.26 quoted above, is understood in terms of the generation of Prajāpati by the gods is comparable to the generation of Indra by the gods to which the following two verses of the *Ṛg Veda* allude :

2.13.5 *The gods have engendered you, the god, with their lauds, like the steed (that is begotten) by the waters. Meet for praise are you.*⁶²

6.19.1 *Great is Indra and well shapen by the shapers.*⁶³

The myth of the surrendering of the power to Indra on the part of the gods can be interpreted in various ways. A number of Vedists consider it as an exponent of the triumph of the cult of Indra over the cult of the ancient gods, which Bergaigne identifies with the Asuras, basing himself in more or less probable reasons.⁶⁴ Dandekar attributes the triumph of the cult of Indra over the cult of Varuṇa, the Asura *par excellence*, to the social transformation which took place among the Aryan tribes when they ceased to be mere nomadic groups of herdsmen and became warriors fighting for the conquest of a new land.

Whatever it is, the fact is that the cult of the Asuras, *qua* asuras, tends to completely disappear from the Vedic religion, be it by assimilation of some of the important asuras into devas (Varuṇa identifying himself with Indra in 4.4.1), be it by acquisition of a demoniacal character by the asuras, which tends to turn them into Vṛtras proper. The concept of Asura, which, as jealous god, partakes in a certain way of the nature both of deva and Vṛtra, fluctuates for a while between both, to resolve itself finally in one of the conceptual components integrating it. Varuṇa and some other principal asuras become devas, losing a great deal of their own personality; the class in

62. "...taṁ tvā stomebhīr udabhir na vājinaṁ devaṁ devā ajanant sāsy ukthyaḥ."

63. "mahāṁ indro...sukṛtaḥ karṣṇbhīr bhūt."

64. A. Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique*, Vol. III, p. 63ss.

itself changes into a kind of Vṛtras, known by the name of Asura/ Rakṣas which the Brāhmaṇas give to them. As we shall see, this point is of exceptional consequences in the development and crystallization of the Vedic spirituality.

However, this is not the only possible interpretation of the cession that the gods make to Indra of their power or "asurya". As we have seen the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* interprets it in terms of the myth of Prajāpati and in our opinion the *R̥g Veda* fully justifies this interpretation, taking account of the texts we have mentioned. From the theological point of view this is undoubtedly the *sensus plenior* of the myth.

Understanding the cession of the "asurya" to Indra on the part of the gods, not as a voluntary cession, but as a forced cession, the myth acquires a similar sense to that of the struggle of Indra against the Vṛtras, and this is how Bergaigne interprets it, quoting in favour of his view-point the testimony of 4.30.5 according to which Indra engages himself in a terrible fight against the furious gods, his enemies. Thus the myth of the supremacy of Indra over the other gods is a myth as polyvalent as the myth of the fight of Zeus against the Titans, which has the following connotations: (a) the struggle between the invading Indo-Europeans and their pantheon, and that of the indigenous population, (b) the endless struggle between cosmos and chaos, good and evil, life and death, light and darkness, the older and the younger generations. Both myths are partly the expression of a great mythical theme, which seems to have spread towards the East and towards the West, starting from a main centre situated in the Fertile Crescent.

Coming back to the myth of Prajāpati. The first thing which strikes us in this myth is again the multiplicity of its connotations, which Eliade throws into relief with these words "The promotion of the bloody sacrifice to a condition for every creation—whether cosmogony or anthropogony,—strengthens in the first place the homologation between man and cosmos (for the Universe also derives from a primordial Giant, a Macranthrop), but, above all, introduces this idea, that life cannot be engendered but starting from another life that is immolated. These types of cosmogonies and anthropogonies will have considerable consequences : man will reach

the point of not conceiving any possible "creation" or "fabrication" without a previous sacrifice. Think, for instance, of the rites of construction by means of which the "life" or "soul" of the victim is transferred to the building itself; this becomes, by the very fact, the architectonical new body of the sacrificed victim.

From the body of the sea monster Tiamat, that he has knocked down, Marduk creates the Universe. Analogous motifs are found everywhere: in the Germanic mythology, the giant Ymir constitutes the primary matter, as P'anku and Puruṣa in the Chinese and Indian mythologies.... To create man Marduk immolates himself: "I will solidify my blood; I will make bones out of it. I will raise up man; truly man will exist...I will build man, the inhabitant of Earth...." King, who was the first to translate this text, connected it with the Mesopotamian tradition of the creation transmitted by Berosus (iv century B.C., author of a precious Chaldean history, written in Greek, today lost): "And Bel seeing that the Earth was desert but fertile, ordered one of the gods to drop his head (Bel's head), to mix the earth with the blood that would flow out of it and to fashion men and animals, capable of enduring the air." Analogous cosmological ideas are found in Egypt. The deep sense of all these myths is rather clear; creation is a sacrifice. One fails to animate what one has created unless transmitting to it one's own life (blood, tears, sperm, "soul", etc)...

Such cosmological conceptions strengthen the homologation man/universe, and various lines of thought prolong and develop this homologation in various directions.⁶⁵

But this is not all. In relation to the Vedic image of the World of which we are speaking the myth of Puruṣa/Prajāpati reveals to us in an authentic way that the cosmic processes of separation and reunion which constitute the creation and redemption of the world and which are, as we have said, in intimate connection with the structure and internal dynamism of the Lord of Trees, are not merely

65. M. Eliade, *Forgerons et Alchimistes*, pp. 30-33.

mechanical, unconscious processes, but they are dominated by a spiritual law of perfect altruism leading to a self immolation, full of understanding and love. To Puruṣa can be applied those marvellous words which 10.13.4 applies to Yama at the moment of his renunciation of immortality for the creation of the human race :

*For the gods' sake (Yama) chose earth, for his offspring's sake he did not choose immortality. (The gods) made the ṛṣi Bṛhaspati their sacrifice. Yama gave up (poured or emptied out) his own dear body*⁶⁶.

Yama no more than repeats at another level the creative immolation of the Puruṣa and it is for this reason that he is called Yama, that is to say, the twin of God, the perfect image of Prajāpati, the Lord of creatures. It is a law of love which governs the cosmic manifestation in its various levels and not a mechanistic process.

Although the myth of Puruṣa/Prajāpati appears late in the Vedic literature, it marvellously complements the older myth of the Lord of trees. The relation between both conceptions is made evident in the Brāhmaṇas. Thus the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, for instance, says :—

3.8.2.17 *For when the gods in the beginning seized (slew) the victim, then, its sacrificial essence flowed downwards, and from it sprang the tree.*

4.5.10.4 *For when the head of the sacrifice was cut off, then "ādāra" plants sprung from the sap which spirited from it.*

These mythical images resemble a giant enlargement, at a cosmic level, of the highly diffused myth concerning the origin of the alimentary plants from the self-sacrifice of a god or a goddess. To ensure the human sustenance a divine being adult or child, male or female, immolates himself and from his body spring one or more alimentary species. One asks oneself whether these themes, which are amply attested, particularly among the planters' culture of the tropical zone, are the embryonic nucleus of the cosmic vision of the Vedas or rather

66. "devēbhyāḥ kam avṛṇīta mṛtyuṁ prajāyai kam amṛtaṁ navṛṇīta/
bṛhaspatiṁ yajñam akṛṇvata ṛṣim priyāṁ yamas tanvaṁ prāṇirecit."

a sort of impoverished reduction of it. What can hardly be doubted is that they are not disconnected, for there are connecting links between them, like the one represented by the story of Gayōmart in the milieu, closely related to India, of the Iranian tradition. When Gayōmart, the primordial man, was assassinated by Ahriman, *he let his seed flow to the earth*. From this seed previously purified by the rotation of heaven was born later the first human couple, Mashyē and Mashyanē, in the form of plants, which later became human beings.

All these traditions are extremely complex and they are placed at the confluence of different symbolisms. The primitive elements they exhibit are by no means exceptional. Primitive elements can indeed be found in every religion, no matter how developed it may look. The periodical crises which these archetypal images undergo are no proof of their lack of sense or of vitality (their resistance to the pass of time indicates the contrary), but of the incapability of reason to drink abundantly from the sources of life and of its intrinsic myopia concerning whatever transcends the limited sphere of the logos.

"Archetypal images are so packed with meaning in themselves that people never think of asking what they really do mean"⁶⁷ like in the case of decorating Christmas trees. And when one eventually asks about their meaning, one does so with the help of reason, which means, with the sum total of one's own prejudices and myopic points of view. No wonder then that the result is a tremendous poverty of symbolism, like the one that afflicts the Christian world at present.

The relation between the sacrifice of Prajāpati and the Cosmic Tree is not only expressed in terms of cause and effect, it is also described in terms which make one think of the Christian account of the crucifixion. Thus the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3.2.2.11-12) explains how the gods scattered the sacrifice, namely Prajāpati, in all directions, by means of the cosmic tree as sacrificial post.

They (namely the gods) sipped the sap of the sacrifice, even as bees would suck honey ; and having drained the sacrifice and scattered

67. C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p. 13.

it by means of the sacrificial post (that is, the cosmic tree), they disappeared.

Now this was heard by the ṛ̥ṣis. They collected the sacrifice. As that sacrifice was collected, so does he who is consecrated now become the sacrifice, for it is he that carries it on, that produces it. And whatever (sap) of the sacrifice was sucked out and drained, that he now restores again.

From this text two things are abundantly clear : a) the continuity and unity of what can be called the creative and redemptive sacrifices, b) that the sacrifice of man has specially a redemptive character, if it is legitimate to speak thus. Men do the same as the gods do but inversely : while the gods scatter the sacrifice, thanks to the cosmic tree that acts as a sacrificial post, men gather it again by means of the same sacrificial post, which conveys it upwards.

One cannot deny that the symbolism of the cosmic tree as sacrificial post comes here very near to the Christian symbolism of the tree of the Cross, which, as has been repeatedly stressed, continues in many aspects the old universal myth. Speaking of this point Mircea Eliade does not hesitate to say the following : "We have already discussed the symbolism of the Tree of the World. Christianity has utilized, interpreted and amplified this symbol. The Cross, made of the tree of good and evil, appears in the place of the cosmic tree ; the Christ himself is described as a tree (by Origen). A homily of the pseudo-Chrysostom speaks of the Cross as a tree which rises from the earth to the heavens. A plant immortal it stands at the centre of heaven and earth ; strong pillar of the universe, bond of all things, support of all the inhabited earth, cosmic interlacement comprising in itself the whole medley of human nature... And the Byzantine liturgy sings even now, on the day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, of the tree of life planted on Calvary, the tree on which the King of Ages wrought our salvation, the tree which springing from the depths of the earth has risen to the centre of the earth and sanctifies the universe unto its limits. The image of the cosmic tree is preserved in astonishing purity...

Fr. de Lubac admits that, like the symbol of the Cosmic Tree of Indian tradition, the image of the Cross as the Tree

of the World is a continuation into Christianity of an old, universal myth."⁶⁸

The idea of the cosmic tree as the instrument of immolation of Prajāpati reveals to us in the most clear way the relationship between the myth of the Lord of Trees and that of the Lord of creatures, for it is evident that the dismemberment of Prajāpati, fixed to the sacrificial post which is the cosmic tree takes place in keeping with the structure of the inverted tree. If the Great Person, the Year or Prajāpati whose essence is Yonder Sun is, as we have seen, the cause of the separation and reunion of all beings, by the very fact of his self-immolation and recomposition, Soma or the Lord of Trees (both are identified in several passages⁶⁹) effects with its dynamism every union and separation as 9.84.2 tells us. This is to say that both conceptions correspond to each other. To us the myth of Prajāpati is but an alternative formulation of the myth of Vanaspati, which it merely personified, removing thus the possible impression that the cosmic process of creation and redemption might have a merely mechanistic character.

The identifications which the Śruti makes between the Lord of Trees and Soma, Soma and the sacrifice, the sacrifice and Prajāpati, to quote only some of the relevant ones, no more than confirm the validity of our conclusion, which the structure and dynamism of the Cosmic Tree of the Vedas enable us to grasp in a direct way.

As we have repeatedly said the descending phase of the sacrifice is a phase of creation, whereas the ascending one is a phase of destruction. Several passages of the Śruti speak clearly in this sense. The *Rg Veda* 3.16.4 describes Agni as the one who produces all the worlds and overcomes or destroys them⁷⁰. The *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* (2.2.1.3) says in another context :

He as up-breathing is a swallower (gr̥tsa), as down-breathing he is delight (mada).

68. Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols*.

69. 1.91.6 calls Soma the praise-loving Lord of Trees (priyastotro vanaspatiḥ), 9.12.7 calls it the tree that yields nectar among prayers.

70. "cakrir yo viśvā bhuvanābhi āsabiś..."

It is worthwhile noticing again in this context the double meaning of the verb "yajati" in Sanskrit, on one side, *to sacrifice*, on the other side *to cause to be* (by means of the sacrifice). This double meaning corresponds to the double function of the sacrifice with respect to the cosmos, to wit, its creation and its destruction, which is mythically assimilated to devouring it. The comparison of the ascending phase of the sacrifice with some sort of devouring the things is by no means a rare image in the Śruti. In the *Rg Veda*, for example, there are several passages in which the eating of the gods is clearly set in relation with this point.⁷¹ To quote some instances :

1.108.2 *As vast as all this world is and unfathomable on account of its limitless extension, so vast may this Soma be to drink, O Indra and Agni.*⁷²

1.5.9 *May Indra accept these viands thousandfold, where all manly powers abide.*⁷³

By the number thousand one understands in the Brāhmaṇas and also in the *Rg Veda* the totality of things, as the following quotations show :

Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 4.6.1.15 : *For a thousand is everything.*

6.69.8 *When you, O Indra and Viṣṇu, fought the battle then you divided this thousand in three parts.*⁷⁴

If one has understood what has been said about the total resignation of the gods in the hands of Indra and about the

71. More rare is that the eating of the gods be related to the descending phase of the sacrifice. There are, however, some passages in this sense also. Thus, for instance, 8.5.31 speaks of the wealth that the Āśvins bring from the distance through devouring it :

You, O immortal Āśvins, bring from beyond the many good edibles, belonging to the Dāsa, by devouring them.

"ā vahethe parākāt pūrvīr aśnantāv aśvinā/iṣo dāsīr amartyā."

72. "yāvad idam bhuvanaṁ viśvam asty uruvyacā varimatā gabhīram/tāvāṁ ayaṁ pātave somo astv...indrāgnī..."

73. "...saned imam vājam indraḥ sahasraṇam/yasmin viśvāni pauryāyā."

74. "...indraś ca viṣṇo yad apaspr̥dhetām tredhā sahasraṁ vi tad airayethām."

destruction of things in the ascending phase of the sacrifice, then one will also understand perfectly the sense of the following verses :

8.2.4 *Indra is the single Soma drinker among gods and men.*⁷⁵

2.8.5 *Our hymns have glorified Agni who becomes the devourer in compliance with his self-rule. He has put on all glories.*⁷⁶

2.31.3 *O Maruts with golden jaws, you mightily approach (the creatures) shaking (all before you).*⁷⁷

6.4.4 *Agni just born has made of his path his food.*⁷⁸

The Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads abound in texts which specify more and more the deep meaning of these passages, their *sensus plenior*. Here are some of them :

Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.2.5 *Whatsoever he brought forth, that he resolved to eat. Verily he devours everything ; that is the liberty (adititva) of Aditi. He who knows thus the liberty of Aditi becomes an eater of all things here.*

Chāndogya Upaniṣad 4.3.6-7 *He said : One god-who is he ? swallowed the four great ones, he, the guardian of the World. O Kāpeya, mortals see him not.*

Saunaka Kāpeya, pondering on that speech, said : "He is the self of the devas, the creator of all beings, with golden tusks, the eater, not without intelligence.

Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad 2.9 *Thus let him worship the moon, saying : "You are Soma, the King, the wise, the five mouthed, the Lord of Creatures. Fire is one of your mouths, with that mouth you eat this world ; make me an eater of food by that mouth. In you there is the fifth mouth ; with that mouth you eat all beings : make me an eater of food by that mouth."*

According to *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.10.4 some of the dead after attaining the world of the fathers by the "pitṛyāna"

75. "indra it somapā eka...antar devān martyāmś ca."

76. "atrim anu svarājyam agnim ukthāni vāvṛdhuḥ/viśvā adhi śriyo dadhe."

77. "...hiraṇyāśiprā maruto davidhvataḥ pṛkṣam yātha..."

According to Velankar's translation.

78. "...cakre agnir januśājmanam."

reach finally the moon or king Soma, where, as the text says, *they are eaten by the devas, yes, the devas eat them.*

See furthermore *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.2.25 :—

Who then knows where he is, he to whom the Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas are (as it were) but food, and death itself a condiment ?

These quotations starting with the stanzas of the *R̥g Veda* that we have presented for examination prove to what extent the primitive idea of the eating and drinking of the gods has been re-interpreted in a deep sense by the Vedic tradition, without losing however in the least its literal sense, according to a constant note of the Vedic hermeneutics⁷⁹.

The entire economy of the cosmos can be envisaged from this particular point of view. As a matter of fact it is described in such familiar terms of eating and food in more than one place in the Śruti. See, for instance, *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣads* 1.4.6 :—

This universe is verily this much : food and the eater of food only.

In almost the same terms speaks *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.10.6 :—

I am food ! I am the eater of food ! I am the first born of ṛta. Before the devas I was in the centre of all that is immortal. He who gives me away, he alone preserves me : him who eats food, I eat as food. I overcome the whole world, I, endowed with golden light. He who knows this (attains all this); this is the Upaniṣad.

See still *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* 2.1.2.15-16 :—

And all that goes hence heaven consumes it all, and all that goes thence the earth consumes it all. That earth is thus food and consumer. He (Heaven) also is both consumer and consumed. No one possesses that which he does not eat, or the things which do not eat him.

Looked at from this standpoint the interchange which takes place between the divine and the human planes by means

79. A text like *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.6.1 : *True the devas do not eat or drink, but they enjoy by seeing the nectar is some sort of exception to the rule.*

of the sacrifice is far from representing a mere exchange of good services between heaven and earth, as Bergaigne pretends.⁸⁰ It is something touching the entire economy of the creation and redemption according to the Vedas.

I am more and more convinced that the Vedas do not speak of accidental things which can be or not be, but of things which are and cannot fail to be as long as the world will exist, because they concern its fundamental laws. The service of the gods or the cult of the ancestors, for instance, is not in the Vedic perspective a kind of interchange of boons between the human and the spirit world, as it is, for example, in the Theravāda tradition, but something which refers to the entire economy of the cosmos. That is what the image of the Tree of the Vedas has revealed to us with all its doctrinal implications and associations, which reveal once more the deep congruence of the doctrinal building of the Śruti, despite the objections often raised against it.

In the mythology of the Vedas the fundamental theme is always achievement of eternal life, the Kingdom of God on Earth, illumination, spiritual and material wealth, or some thing else of the kind. But the dominant principle is not the egoistical principle of the "do ut des," as it is often pointed out, but the altruistic and spiritual principle of the sacrifice, which in the eyes of the ṛṣis is the law that has to govern the entire economy of the world.

80. "Cette conception de l'offrande comme un aliment ou un breuvage réellement consommé par les dieux fait en somme du sacrifice et de sa récompense un échange de bons offices entre la terre et le ciel."

See A. Bergaigne, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 229.

CHAPTER VI

THE ATTAINMENT OF ṚTA

There are several problems concerning the place of rest that man attains after death, according to the famous funeral hymn of the *Ṛg Veda*, the fourteenth of the tenth maṇḍala. It is not our intention to enter here into all these problems. What we want to point out is the apparent coincidence of this place of rest with the seat of ṛta and the bosom of the waters, mentioned above.

The verse 10.14.9 shows us immediately the kinship between the two places. It says :

“Ahobhir adbhir aktubhir vyaktam yamo dadāty avasānam asmai.”

*Yama gives him a dwelling-place anointed with ointments, (to wit), the waters and the diurnal splendours.*¹

This kinship impresses one all the more when one reads the verses, 7-11 of 9.113, usually connected with the last one. They say :

There where the eternal light shines, in the world where Soar resides, there, O Pavamāna, place me, in the immortal, imperishable world.

There where (Yama), the Son of Vivasvat, dwells as king, where is the sacred precinct of heaven, where are those waters young and fresh, there make me immortal.

There where one can wander at pleasure in the threefold firmament, in the threefold sky, where are the radiant worlds of heaven, there make me immortal.

1. Even though Sāyaṇa and with him most of the translators understand by “aktubhiḥ” “rātribhiḥ”, I prefer to maintain its primary meaning which it keeps for instance in 9.50.5 :

Flow, most exhilarating, anointed with ointments, (namely), the cows (or the milk) ! (Flow), O Indu, for Indra, for his drink !

“sa pavasva madintama gobhir añjāno aktubhiḥ indav indrāya pitaye.”

There where desires and inclinations (are fulfilled), where is the highest place of the sun, where is one's own native soil and satiation, there make me immortal.

There where dwell bliss, delight, joy and felicity, where the desire of desires is attained, there make me immortal²

Before considering the possible similarities between the place of beatitude described in these verses and the "svarga" or *heaven* of the popular tradition, or of whatever other tradition, it is good to direct our attention to the perfect similitude between the place described in these stanzas and the "apām upastha" and the "ṛtasya yoni" of which we have spoken above, the place of confluence of the celestial rivers with the supreme sea, the residence of Apām Napāt, the Son of Waters. If we are not mistaken the one is the same as the other. Hence it follows that the Veda contemplates the possibility of attaining ṛta after death.

The question of the attainment of the seat of ṛta is not however one which is confined to the future life alone; it equally concerns the present life. The hymn 9.113 just quoted does not precisely make reference to the hereafter, but to the present moment of the liturgical celebration in which (yatra) the priest pronouncing together with the press-stones the rhythmic word on Soma, feels elated, bringing forth delight at the same time as Soma.³

Not only in this hymn but in several others also unmistakable reference is made to the attainment of the supreme place here and now. See some significant quotations :

2. "yatra jyotir ajasraṁ yasminloke svar hitam/tasmin māṁ dbehi pavamānāmṛte loka akṣita..."
- "yatra rājā vaivasvato yatrāvarodhanaṁ divaḥ/yatrāmūr yahvatir āpas tatra māṁ amṛtaṁ kṛdhi..."
- "yatrānukāmaṁ caraṇaṁ trināke tridive divaḥ/lokā yatra jyotiṣman-tas tatra māṁ amṛtaṁ kṛdhi..."
- "yatra kāmā nikāmās ca yatra bradhnasya viṣṭapam/ svadhā ca yatra tṛptiś ca tatra māṁ amṛtaṁ kṛdhi..."
- "yatrānandās ca modās ca mudāḥ pramuda ātate/kāmasya yatrāptāḥ kāmās tatra māṁ amṛtaṁ kṛdhi....."
3. "yatra brahmā...chandasyaṁ vācaṁ vadan/grāvnā some mahiyate somenānandaṁ janayann..."

1.31.7 You, Agni, bring the mortal to the highest immortality and glory day by day.⁴

1.36.8 Having slain Vṛtra, they conquered Heaven and Earth, and the Waters, and made the Vast their abode.⁵

1.46.11 The path of ṛta is prepared in order to reach safely the other shore. The road of heaven has become visible.⁶

1.72.4 A mortal, discerning in the distance, found Agni, who was stationed in the highest abode.⁷

1.110.4 Having zealously performed the sacrificial works with the help of the holy work, the sacrificers attained immortality. The Sons of Sudhanvan, the radiant R̥bhus, found by means of their prayers complete fulfilment in the Year (=Sun).⁸

1.125.5 The liberal giver stands in the height of heaven, transplanted there. He verily goes to the gods.⁹

3.31.9-10 They sat down with fervent mind making themselves a way to immortality with the help of the hymns.

Looking together, they rejoiced at their possession, while they were drawing the milk of the primordial seed. Their clamour set on fire heaven and earth.¹⁰

4.5.9 I found in the seat of ṛta the fast, the rapid, (the face) that shines in secret.¹¹

2.21.5 By means of sacrifice the Uśij, crossing the waters found the way, giving impulse to their thought and meditating. By means of

4. "tvam tam agne amṛtatve uttame martam dadhāsi śravase dive-dive."

5. "ghnanto vṛtram ataran rodasī apa uru kṣayāya cakrire..."

6. "abhūd u pāram etave panthā ṛtasya sādhyā/adarāi vi śrutir divah."

7. "...vidan marto nemadhitā cikivān agniṁ pade parame tasthivām-sam."

8. "viṣṭvi śamī taranitvena vāghato martāsaḥ santo amṛtatvam ānāsuḥ/saudhanvanā r̥bhavaḥ sūracakṣasaḥ samvatsare sam apr̥cyanta dhitrībhiḥ."

9. "nākasya pṛṣṭhe adhi tiṣṭhati śrito yaḥ pṛṇāti sa ha dev̥ṣu gacchati."

10. "ni gavyatā manasā sedur arkaiḥ kṛṇvānāso amṛtatvāya gātum..."
"sampaśyamānā amadann abhi svam̐ payaḥ pratnasya retaso dughā-nāḥ/vi rodasī atapad ghoṣa cṣām..."

11. "...ṛtasya pade adhi didyānam̐ guhā raghusyad raghuyad viveda."

prayer and sacrificial session they obtained in Indra¹² the cows and the riches, imploring help and stimulating themselves.¹³

8.48.3 We have drunk Soma, become immortal, gone to the light, found the gods.¹⁴

10.136.3 Transported into ecstasy in the "muni"-way we have climbed up the winds. Only our bodies you see, O mortals, before you.¹⁵

The attainment of *ṛta*, the supreme ideal of the Vedic spirituality, is not only incumbent upon men, but also upon the gods themselves. Over and over again the texts describe to us the gods as ascending to the seat of *ṛta*, either to bring there the sacrifice of men or to draw out all kinds of boons or just for their own enjoyment and peaceful rest, or else for the attainment of supreme dominion. Here are some of these texts :

1.25.10 Varuṇa, the maintainer of the laws, has sat down in the waters for the sake of universal sovereignty, he (who is) wise.¹⁶

2.38.8 Whenever it is possible, Varuṇa withdraws into the aqueous womb, he who moves unceasingly, every moment, up and down.¹⁷

3.5.7 Agni has ascended to the fat womb, that has a wide access, desiring the desirable, resplendent, pure, sublime, purifying. (There) he makes his parents new again and again.¹⁸

3.53.6 Go home, Indra ; a beautiful wife and enjoyment is waiting for you at home.¹⁹

12 Indra stands here either for the ultimate reality or for the supernal sun.

13. 'yajñena gātum apturo vividrire dhiyo hinvānā uśījo manīṣiṇaḥ/ abhisvarā niṣadā gā avasyava indre hinvānā draviṇāny āsata.'

14. "apāma somam amṛtā abhūmāganma jyotir avidāma devān..."

15. "unmaditā mauneyena vātān ā tasthimā vayam/śarīred asmākaṁ yūyam martāso abhi paśyatha."

16. "ni śasāda dhṛtavrato varuṇaḥ pastyāsvā/sāmrājyāya sukratuḥ."

17. "yādrādhyaṁ varuṇo yonim apyāma anīṣitaṁ nīmīṣi jarbhurāṇaḥ..."

18. "ā yonim agnir ghṛtavantam asthīt pṛthupragāṇam āśāntam uśānaḥ/ dīdyanāḥ śucir īsvaḥ pāvakaḥ punaḥ-punar mātaraḥ navyasi kaḥ."

19. "...astam indra pra yāhi kalyāṇir jāyā suraṇaṁ gṛhe te..."

The meaning of the verse is clarified by the verse 4 of the same hymn:

*The wife is one's own house, O Maghavan, she is the womb. Let your bay steeds, yoked, carry you there.*²⁰

5.47.2 *The nimble (coursers), whose work is this, have climbed hastily, the navel of immortality. Endless broad paths cross heaven and earth all around.*²¹

5.67.2 *When you sit down on the golden womb, O Varuṇa and Mitra, supporters of the people, then grant us your favour, O destroyers of enemies.*²²

7.49.4 *Let these waters protect me here in whom king Varuṇa, in whom Soma, in whom all the gods drink their strength, into whom Agni Vaiśvānara penetrated.*²³

7.67.8 *In one and the same journey your car circumambulates the seven streams, O active ones ! Your stately (horses) do not get tired, who yoked to the pole, by you, O gods, carry you swiftly to the goal, (O Āsvins)*²⁴

7.87.6 *Varuṇa has descended into the sea, like the day, like the white drop, the powerful creature. Then without ceasing to worship in the depths he measures the space and penetrates easily into his realm, he (who is) the king of this existence.*²⁵

Comparing the attainment of ṛta with the attainment of Brahman of the later tradition we find two important differences.

- (a) from Brahman there is no return, whereas there is often mention of a return from the seat of ṛta in the Vedas ;

20. 'jāyeda astam maghavant sed u yonis tad it tvā yuktā harayo vahantu.'

21. "ajirāsa tadapa iyamānā ātasthivāmsō amṛtasya nābhim/anantāsa uravo viśvataḥ sīm pari dyāvāpṛthivī yanti panthāḥ."

22. 'ā yad yonim hiraṇyayaṁ varuṇa mitra sadathaḥ/dhartārā carṣaṇīnām yantaṁ sumnam riśādasā.'

23. "yāsu rājā varuṇo yāsu somo viśve devā yāsū jan madanti/vaiśvānaro yāsu agniḥ praviṣṭas tā āpo devir iha mām avantu."

24. "ekasmin yoge bhuraṇā samāne pari vām sapta sṛavato ratho gāt/na vāyanti subhvo devayuktā ye vām dhūrṣu taraṇayo vahanti."

25. "ava sindhum varuṇo dyaur iva sthād drapso na śveto mṛgas tuviṣmān/ gambhīraśamso rajaso vimānaḥ supārakṣatraḥ sato asya rājā,"

- (b) the attainment of Brahman represents the extinction of plurality, whereas the attainment of *rta* does not seem to imply such an extinction.

These apparent divergences deserve attentive consideration. Let us comment upon each point separately.

(a) *The return from the seat of rta*

An interpretation which considers itself to be traditional would say that *rta* does not differ in this sense from the later "svarga", from where one returns at the extinction of the merits accumulated on account of the good works. This interpretation forgets, however, that the Veda does not speak, as it is generally admitted, of rebirth,²⁶ and that in consequ-

26. "In no Vedic text earlier than the Upaniṣads can the doctrine of the souls transmigration be certainly ascertained", says Paul Deussen (*The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads*, p. 317). That does not mean that there may not be implicit allusions to it in the Vedas, in compliance with the Upaniṣadic hermeneutics of the Veda (cf. for instance, *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (6.2.2), but there are not explicit and clear allusions to it. That which in the context of Buddhism would be incomprehensible, because the doctrine of rebirth is one of its essential dogmas, is not inexplicable in the case of the Vedic religion, since, after all, the doctrine of rebirth is considered in Hinduism as "*aparā vidyā*", a knowledge of secondary order, valid only for the exoteric (cf. P. Deussen, *op. cit.*, p. 315), and can therefore be silenced in the Vedas, dealing by definition with the "*parā vidyā*" or highest knowledge only. Veda is synonymous with highest Wisdom.

That of course in case of respecting the traditional conception of the Veda, which refuses to attribute to it any ignorance about important religious matters.

Even though the Veda does not speak in proper terms of a rebirth governed by the law of karma, it mentions however a form of rebirth governed by the laws of *yajña*, of *rta*, by the demands of what is known as *dharma* in the Upaniṣadic period. It is a kind of rebirth which bears a great similarity with that sort of free reincarnation that the Gītā attributes to Kṛṣṇa, whenever the *dharma* is at stake. I would not hesitate to understand in this sense a text like *Rg Veda* 4.26.1.

*I was Manu and Sūrya; I am Kakṣivāt, the ṛṣi with powerful words;
I am the kavi Uśanas; look at me !*

ence the return from the seat of ṛta cannot have the same sense as the return from "svarga". To say that it is the same thing is to commit an obvious anachronism. But even supposing that this were not the case, the return from ṛta could not simply be equated with the return from "svarga", since the latter is conceived as something imperative, unavoidable (on account of the law of karma), whereas the former is everywhere described as being essentially free and spontaneous (anu svadhām...). See as an example the following texts regarding the Maruts, which speak of the absolute freedom with which they come out from the seat of ṛta in order to assume sacrificial functions :—

5.58.1 *I want to praise now this strong host of theirs, who travel impetuously with swift horses and are in possession of immortality, as free lords (uteśire amṛtasya svarājāḥ).*²⁷

1.88.2 *They travel at will (varam ā), for the welfare (of beings), with their reddish, tawny horses that overtake the (other) cars.*²⁸

1.87.2 *When in the depths you decide the trip (yayim acidhvam), by whatever path it be, O Maruts of bird-like aspect, then the pails drip in your cars.*²⁹

With the same freedom with which the Maruts come out of the supreme plane, with this same freedom they regain it, according to the words of 1.6.4 :—

Thereafter, according to their wish (svadhām anu) they

In the Vedic context Manu and Sūrya are perfect realities and have nothing to do with transmigrating entities. That is why I do not understand this text as referring to rebirth in the later sense.

27. "tam u nūnam taviṣimantam eṣāṁ stuṣe gaṇam...ye āśvaśvā amavad vabanta uteśire amṛtasya svarājāḥ."

28. "te 'runebhir varam ā piśāṅgaiḥ śubhe kam yānti rathatūrbhiḥ āśvaiḥ..."

29. "upahvareṣu yad acidhvam yayim vaya iva marutaḥ kena cit pathā/ ścotanti kośā upa vo ratheṣv ā..."

attained again the embryonic state and assumed the adorable name (of *rta*).³⁰

By *embryonic state* or "garbhatvam" I understand the unmanifested state that the Maruts attain at will, when no specific mission is incumbent upon them.

The freedom of the Maruts to come out of the seat of *rta* is evidently not a privilege of theirs, but it extends itself logically to the other gods and the *pitṛs*.³¹

It there is any force compelling the gods to leave their rest, their enjoyment in the seat of *rta*, this is not of a karmic order, but of an order which could be called moral, to wit, their zeal for the maintenance of the order of *rta*, of its statutes and laws, always exposed in the eyes of the Veda to possible attacks from the hordes of *anṛta*. It is something like the moral compulsion which, according to the *Gṛā*, obliges *Kṛṣṇa* to manifest himself in the world whenever the "dharma" is at stake or whenever there is a serious danger of the predominance of "adharma".

In compliance with the cited texts the exit from the seat of *rta* represents in all certainty the free assumption of cosmic functions for the welfare of all beings (*śubhe kam*)³², and not a compulsory abandonment of the paradise for want of subsisting merits. Besides, this coming out does not necessarily mean abandoning, as certain texts seem to indicate. We have already

30. "ādaha svadhām anu punar garbhatvam erire/dadhānā nāma yajñi-yam."

Griffith, following Max Müller, understands differently "garbhatvam", namely, as *the state of new born babes*. Accordingly he renders the stanza as follows :

Thereafter, they, as is their wont, threw off the state of babes unborn, assuming sacrificial names.

Understood in this sense the verse speaks of the freedom with which the Maruts leave the supreme plane and not of the freedom with which they return to it. Anyway it is equally relevant in the present context.

31. Cf. 1.62.8, 1.113.13, 7.6.6, 7.101.3, et.

32. Cf. 1.88.2 quoted above.

seen the stanza 1.24.7 speaking of the flames or rays of the cosmic tree, symbols undoubtedly of the gods, *sinking down and yet standing still at the same time* (nicīnāḥ sthuḥ) and as capable of penetrating in the world, while *their bottom is high above* (upari budhna eṣām). Of the same contrast speaks 3.6.4 with reference to Agni :—

*He, the great, though seated in his eternal abode, (travels however) between heaven and earth.*³³

The sense of the verse is clear if one bears in mind that the expression “sadasthe dhruve,” *in the eternal or permanent abode*, as well as its synonymous “pade dhruve”, “sadasi dhruve”, refer always to the supreme plane.³⁴

Equally clear is in our opinion the meaning of 3.55.7 :—

*The child of two mothers (Agni) is the hotṛ, the sole lord in the sacrificial sessions. (Though) he moves by one end, his (invisible) bottom stands still.*³⁵

Bergaigne, who gives the same meaning to the stanza, connects it further with a series of passages which point out a similar contrast between the immobility of the highest plane or state and the movement of its manifestations : “While the

33 “mahānt sadasthe dhruva ā nisatto ’ntar dyāvā...”

34. See 1.22.14 *The inspired poets lick with their songs (dhītibhiḥ), in the eternal abode of the Gandharva, the milk of these two, (Heaven and Earth), which is rich in fatness.*

“taylor id ghrtavat payo viprā rihanti dhītibhiḥ/gandharvasya dhruve pade.”

2.41.57 *The two kings, devoid of guile, sit in the eternal supreme abode, that has thousand pillars.*

“rājānāv anabhidruhā dhruve sadasy uttame/sahasrasthūṇa āsāte.”

3.54. *The two, (Heaven and Earth), stand watchful, united and at the same time separated, ending in the distance, in the eternal abode.*

“samānyā viyute dūre-ante dhruve sadasi tasthatur jāgarūke.”

9.40.2 *May the red one mount to his place. May the bull, pressed out, go to Indra. He sits down in his eternal abode.*

“ā yonim aruṇo ruhad gamad indram vṛṣā sutah/dhruve sadasi sīdati.”

35. “dvimātā hotā vidatheṣu samrāḥ anv agraṁ carati kṣeti budhnaḥ...”

foetus is detached the mother remains immobile, 10.27.14. While Agni walks, the envelope is lying, 10.4.4... Where?—Beyond the limits of the visible world, where take place the manifestations of this fire, whose permanent essence remains immobile and hidden 3.55.7 :

*The sacrificer who has two mothers is king in the assemblies, he moves himself by one end, his base remains immovable.*³⁶

A perusal of all the passages where the word "budhna" appears in the *Rg Veda* has convinced me that it refers everywhere to the highest and deepest part of the universe. In consequence I cannot agree with those who refer it in the present case to the basis of the altar, from where the flames of the sacrificial fire ascend with gracile movements, unless, of course, one would identify in an hermetic sense the altar and the remotest part of the world from which everything originates according to the Vedic conception, an identification which can be certainly supported with more than one passage of the Scriptures.

The sense of the verses 3.6.4 and 3.55.7, just quoted, is further manifested by the daring image of 5.73.3 depicting the car of the Aśvins as having a fixed wheel and moving itself by means of the other.

*For the greatest amazement you have held back one wheel of the car, (with the other) you fly in might around the remaining generations of Nahuṣ and the regions.*³⁷

This image helps us to understand the equally daring image of 6.59.6 :

*Leaving the head behind (and yet) wandering and speaking aloud with his tongue, (Agni) has walked down the thirty steps*³⁸, which mythically separate the heaven from the earth. Cf. the mythical conception of three steps of Viṣṇu.

The stanza 1.164.36 presents an image which I feel very much inclined to understand in the same sense. It says :

36. A. Bergaigne, *La Religion Vedique*, vol- II, p. 87.

37. "irmānyad vapuṣe vapuṣ cakram yemathuḥ/ pary anyā nāhuṣā yugā mahānā rajāmsi diyathaḥ."

38. "...hitvi śiro jihvayā vāvadac carat trimśat padā ny akramīt."

*Seven half-embryos are busy distributing the seed of the world, according to the instruction of Viṣṇu.*³⁹

The expression "ardha-garbha" which appears only here is quite interesting. It has been definitely chosen to indicate a double nature or state of the seven beings who are busy distributing the primordial seed of the world according to Viṣṇu's instructions. Their semiembryonic character means that they are half-formed and half-unformed, half in the womb, half out of the womb, and by implication half-active and half-inactive, since it would be absurd to imagine that they are active by that part of them which is unformed and in the womb. Just as Agni according to the previous stanza leaves behind his head and moves only in the world by means of the rest of his body, in a similar way the seven beings mentioned in the last verse are active by the part of their body which is formed and out of the womb, while they remain quiet, inactive by that section of theirs, which is unformed and hidden in the womb.

It is peculiar that the Veda should speak of this doctrinal point under images only and not directly, but this is perhaps an exigence of its esoterical sense, to which clear reference is made in 7.87.4 and 4.3.16 :—

*The inspired seer who knows the secrets of the (supreme) abode should not publish them, if he wants to be helpful to the future generation.*⁴⁰

*All these are secret words that I have uttered to you who know, O Agni, O Disposer, words of leading, words of seer-knowledge that express their meaning to the seer,—I have spoken them illumined in my words and thinkings.*⁴¹

Only for the ignorant, says the Veda itself, there is no esoteric meaning in the Śruti :

39. "satpārdhagarbhā bhuvanasya reto viṣṇoḥ tiṣṭhanti pradiśā vidharmani..."

40. "...vidvān padasya guhyā na vocad yugāya vipra uparāya śikṣan."

41. "etā viśvā viduḥ tubhyaṁ vedho nīthāny agne nīṇyā vacāṁsi/ni vacanā kavaye kāvyāny aśamsiṣaṁ matibhir vipra ukthaiḥ."

According to Sri Aurobindo's translation.

*The occult truths do not exist for the mind of the ignorant.*⁴²

There are still other passages speaking of the simultaneous permanence of the gods in the supreme abode and of their manifestation in the different planes of existence. See, among them 1.165.10 :—

*The strong divine coursers move swiftly by the ends, while they are compact in the centre.*⁴³

The divine coursers are the gods, conceived here as in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 3.9.2.6⁴⁴ as the rays of light of the supernal sun. About these divine rays the stanza tells us that they move in a radial way only, but are fixed in the centre. The idea is the same as in all the previous quotations.

Let us now pass to the verse 7.33.9 :—

*The Vasiṣṭhas penetrate with the inner light of the heart into the thousand times ramified secret (and) while they weave in the frame stretched forth by Yama, they possess at the same time (upasedur) the Apsaras.*⁴⁵

The Vasiṣṭhas entering into the cosmic tree weave there the creative texture of the sacrifice without losing at the same time their possession and fruition of the Apsaras, the immortal waters, which, as 3.1.6 says, *neither eat nor suffer, neither dress nor are naked*. Notice by the way that the most probable etymology of Apsaras is precisely *those who do not eat* : “a-psaras”, as contrasted to “su-psaras”, “madhu-psaras.”

Not very different from the meaning of the last stanza is the meaning of the 7.87.6 It says :—

42. 7.61.5 : “...na vām nityāny acite abhūvan.”

43. “īrmāntāsaḥ silikamadhyamāsaḥ saṁ śūraṇāso divyāso atyāḥ...”
“silika-madhyamāsaḥ” is interpreted by Grassmann as meaning in *der Mitte eng aneinander geschlossen* in agreement with Sāyaṇa’s paraphrase “madhye nividās”, which means *close compact, without interstices in the centre*. Even though the etymology of “silika-madhyamāsaḥ” is obscure, Sāyaṇa’s interpretation of its meaning is probably correct.

44. *And all the gods are his rays of light*, says Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 3.9.2.6. *His* refers to the supernal sun.

45. “te in nityam hṛdayasya praketaiḥ sahasravalāsam abhi saṁ caranti/ yamena tatam paridhiṁ vayanto ’psarasa upa sedur vasiṣṭhāḥ.”

*Varuṇa has descended into the sea, like the day, like the white drop, the strong creature. Then without ceasing to worship in the depths, he measures the space and penetrates easily in his realm, he who is king of this existence.*⁴⁶

Varuṇa leaves only apparently the depths of the supreme sea to enter into the world, as the king of this existence. In fact he never abandons the depths of the immortal waters, that he worships at all times in the midst of his cosmic activities.

From all these quotations it comes out clearly that the exit from the supreme plane does not necessarily imply an abandonment of it. As if clarifying this point a modern Indian mystic says :—

“Some people climb the seven floors of a building and cannot get down, but some climb up, then, at will, visit the lower floors.”⁴⁷

Needless to say that in the Vedic conception all those who have attained immortality belong to the second category and not to the first, for, as the same mystic would say, “the play belongs to whom eternity belongs, and eternity to him to whom the play belongs.”⁴⁸

The more I think of this problem, the more I find it difficult to draw up an essential difference between what the Vedas say and the Upaniṣads. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, for example, states in the most emphatic way that those who know the Self, unlike those who do not know it, are free to manifest themselves in all the worlds. See 8.1.6 :—

Those who depart from here without having discovered the Self and those true desires, for them there is no freedom in all the worlds. But those who depart from hence after having discovered the Self and those true desires, for them there is freedom in all the worlds.

These last words do not sound essentially different from what the verse 9.113.9, quoted above, tells us about the im-

46. *ava sindhuṃ varuṇo dyaur iva sthād drapso na śveto mrgas tuviṣmān/ gambhīraśaṁso rajaso vimānaḥ supārakṣatraḥ sato asya rājā.*”

47. Swamy Nikhilananda (translator), *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 396.

48. Swamy Nikhilananda (translator), *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

mortal state, *where one can wander at pleasure in the threefold firmament, in the threefold sky, there where are the radiant worlds of heaven.*⁴⁹

Even if one wants to persist differentiating the Vedic and the Upaniṣadic doctrines concerning the attainment of the supreme plane, in spite of the various indices of concord (agreement) that we have found, I think that what is not permissible is to interpret by the light of the later formulations of the doctrine of karma and rebirth the concrete question of the descent of devas and pitṛs from the seat of rta in order to assume sacrificial functions. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (4.4.2.3) categorically affirms that the pitṛs do not come back anymore :—

For the fathers have passed away once for all.

It is only due to a certain influence of Buddhism with its conception of the gods as sâṁsâric beings, bound by karma and rebirth, that people find sometimes it difficult to understand the Vedic doctrine of the gods as enlightened beings who move freely in the different planes of existence. And yet the terms in which the entire Śruti speaks, from the Vedas till the Upaniṣads, are categorical. According to the testimony of the whole Śruti the Vedic gods are fully enlightened beings, not certainly by nature or from the very beginning, but on account of their adherence to the order of the Truth, to the law of sacrifice, on account of their penance and asceticism, which enabled them to kindle within them the immortal fire and to become possessed of the indestructible sound (akṣara brahman). Here are some of the accounts of this transcendental event which from the standpoint of the Śruti is the token of the attainment of immortality on the part of the entire creation.

In the words of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (2.2.2.8-14) the gods become immortal by placing the immortal Agni within themselves. Here is the narration :

Now the gods and the asuras, both of them sprung from Prajapati were contending with each other. They were both soulless, for they were mortal, and he who is mortal is soulless. Among these two

49. "yatrānukāmaṁ caraṇaṁ trināke tridive divaḥ/lokā yatra jyotiṣmantas..."

classes of beings who were mortal, Agni alone was immortal ; and it was through him, the immortal, that they both lived. Now whichever (of the gods) they (the asuras) slew, he, indeed, was so (slain).

Thereupon the gods were left inferior. They went on praising and practising austerities, hoping that they might be able to overcome their enemies, the mortal asuras. They beheld this immortal Agnyādheya (consecrated fire).

They said : "Come, let us place that immortal element in our innermost soul."

The gods then established that (fire) in their innermost soul ; and having established that immortal element in their innermost soul, and become immortal and unconquerable, they overcame their mortal, conquerable enemies.

According to Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 11.1.2.12 the fire of the previous quotations is identical with the Year, namely, Agni/Prajāpati :

Now, indeed, the gods were at first mortal and only when they had gained the Year they were immortal ; for the Year is everything, and the Imperishable means everything : thereby then accrues to him imperishable merit, the imperishable world.

This is not basically different from what Rg Veda 6.7.4 says :

*All the gods, O immortal, acclaim you at your birth like a child; by your power they have arrived at immortality, O Vaiśvānara, when you shone (in the bosom) of your parents.*⁵⁰

The teaching of the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas coincides perfectly with the teaching of the Upaniṣads, which represent to us the gods as not being from the very beginning immortal, that is, in possession of the knowledge of Brahman, but as having acquired it later from Prajāpati, through the medium of Indra, whom they deputed for this extraordinarily important mission. Speaking of this the Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.7-12 says :—

Prajāpati said : "The Self which is free from sin, free from old age, from death and grief, from hunger and thirst, which desires nothing what it ought to desire, and imagines nothing but what it

50. "tvām viśve amṛte jāyamānam śiśum na devā abhi sam nayante/tava kratubhir amṛtatvam āyan vaiśvānara yat pitror adideḥ."

ought to imagine, that is which we must search out, that is which we must try to understand. He who has searched out that Self and understands it, obtains all worlds and all desires."

The devas and asuras both heard these words and said : "Well, let us search for that Self by which , if one has searched it out, all worlds and all desires are obtained."

Thus saying Indra went from the devas, Virocana from the Asuras, and both, without having communicated with each other, approached Prajāpati, holding fuel in their hands, as is the custom for pupils approaching their masters.

Then Prajāpati revealed to them an aspect only of the doctrine of the Self, whereafter Virocana, satisfied in his heart, went away without making further inquiries, wherea Indra, perceiving that this could not be the complete truth about the Self approached again the divine Guru and stayed with him for hundred and five years till he gained complete enlightenment ; whereafter he could convey it to the her so devas. The account ends with these words :

The devas who are in the world of Brahman meditate on that Self (as taught by Prajāpati to Indra and by Indra to the devas). Therefore all the worlds belong to them, and all desires. He who knows that Self and understands it obtains all worlds and all desires. Thus said Prajāpati, yea, thus said Prajāpati.

As if summarizing this Upaniṣadic doctrine the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (11.2.3.6) says :

In the beginning, indeed, the gods were mortal, and only when they had become possessed of the Brahman they were immortal.

The Buddhistic and later popular doctrine of the gods as fixed in the realm of sāṃsāric existence should by no means overcloud the clear sky of the Vedic thought. From the standpoint of the Śruti the gods, conceived as the rays of the divine sun, are not only luminous but enlightened. They are the luminous and enlightened thoughts of the divine mind that maintain everything here. Not only that, but in a way true knowledge belongs to them alone, as the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (10.3.5.12-13) says :

But, indeed, the mystic import (Upaniṣad) is the essence of this yajus. Satiation, doubtless, is the successful issue there of. And

joy, the knowledge thereof, is its soul ; and, assuredly, all the gods are of joyful soul ; and, this, the true knowledge, belongs to the gods alone, and, indeed, whosoever knows this is not a man, but one of the gods.

It is only under these perspectives that one has to ponder the Vedic doctrine of the return from the seat of *ṛta*, which, as said, does not imply an abandonment of it, and not under the influence of alien points of view, Buddhist etc, which, even if they speak of something true (karma, rebirth), they speak definitely of something else.

The question concerning the multiplicity in the seat of ṛta

The *Rg Veda* abounds in texts speaking of multiplicity in the supreme abode just as it abounds in texts speaking of the attainment of unity in the same plane. See by way of example the following passages all of which speak of plurality in the highest sphere :

3.55.12 *Where the two cows that yield nectar, mother and daughter, suckle together, (namely), in the seat of ṛta, there I worship them both.*⁵¹

3.54.6 *The seer endowed with the divine eye, saw them enjoying themselves separately (?) in the bosom of ṛta. In different places have they prepared their seat like a bird, and yet they find themselves together in the same spirit.*⁵²

5.67.2 *When you sit in the golden womb, O Mitra and Varuṇa, the supporters of mankind, grant us your favour, O destroyers of the enemies ?*⁵³

3.62.13 *Soma goes there where he finds the gods, (namely), to the seat of ṛta*⁵⁴

See for further references the texts quoted in chapter two about the gods as being born, growing, nourishing themselves and resting in the bosom of *ṛta*.

51. "mātā ca yatra duhitā dhenū sabardughe dhāpayete samīci/ṛtaya te sadasiḥ antar..."

52. "kavir nṛcakṣā abhi śim acaṣṭa ṛtasya yonā vighṛte madanti/nānā cakrāt: sadanaṁ yathā veḥ samāne kratunā sarividāne."

53. "ā yad yoniṁ hiraṇyayaṁ varuṇa mitra sadathaḥ/dhartārā carṣaṇī-nāṁ yantaṁ sumnaṁ riśādasā."

54. "somo jigāti gātuvid devānām eti niṣkṛtam/ṛtasya yoniṁ āsadam."

All these texts contrast, it goes without saying, with all those speaking of the attainment of unity in the supreme plane, such as

2.3.2 *May Narāśansa unite the gods in the head (mūrdhan) of the sacrifice.*⁵⁵

6.28.2 *Indra places the worshipper in one fallow-land which is undivided.*⁵⁶

2.3.7 *While they (the two first divine hotrs) sacrifice (to) the gods at the proper time, they unite them at the navel of the world, above the three heights.*⁵⁷

5.62.1 *Your rta is firmly covered by the rta, there where they unyoke the horses of Sūrya. Ten hundred stay there together. This oneness I consider the greatest wonder of the gods.*⁵⁸

The verse speaks of how the entire spiritual world, to wit the cosmic tree with its thousand branches, becomes one there where the horses of Sūrya are set free, that is to say, in the bosom of the waters or of rta, and how the seer considers this unification as the highest prodigy accomplished by the gods which allows this wonder to take place. Something like that would be inconceivable in the Theravāda tradition, for example, where the gods are supposed to be fixed in different spheres of existence.

See some other verses speaking of the same theme;

1.35.6 *There are three heavens; two are the lap of Savitṛ, one is the world of Yama and prevails over gods and men*⁵⁹.

The heaven of Yama is, as Geldner says, the highest heaven, to which neither gods nor men can approach without being destroyed. Such is the sense of "virāṣāt" which accor-

55. "narāśansaḥ...mūrdhan yajñasya sam anaktu devān."

56. "indro...abhinne khilye ni dadhāti devayum."

57. "...devān yajantāv ṛtuthā sam añjato nābhā pṛthivyā adhi sānuṣu triṣu."

58. "ṛtena ṛtam apihitam dhruvam vīm sūryasya yatra vimucanty aivān/ daśa śatā saha tasthus tad ekam devānām śreṣṭham vapuṣām apaśyam."

59. "tisro dyāvaḥ savitur dvā upasthām ekā yamasya bhuvane virā-ṣāt..."

ding to Sāyaṇa means “virān gant̃n saḥate”, namely, that which overcomes, defeats, prevails over the heroes (human or divine) who go there. The compound is similar in meaning to “turāṣaḥ”, an epithet of Indra, which means *he who prevails over the strong ones*, namely the Vṛtras, whom Indra attacks and destroys. (Cf. for instance 6.32.5).

Another interesting stanza in this order of ideas is 4.24.3:

On him only call the heroes during the combat. Giving up their bodies they make him their shelter, when both kinds of heroes (singers and offerers) sacrifice each other mutually in order to conquer the prolific seed (=the waters)⁶⁰.

The context makes clear that the verse does not speak of any combat on earth, but of the combat for the attainment of the celestial waters, which are the world. (See what Lüders says on the complementary concept of “retas”). This combat demands at a certain point the mutual sacrifice of the combatants, who give up themselves or their bodies to Indra and make him their refuge. (See the various formulations of this idea that we have mentioned in the previous chapter). Fundamentally the meaning of the verse does not differ from the meaning of 1.72.5.

Become of one mind they approached him on their knees, accompanied by their wives, and paid homage to him who deserves homage. Then, giving up their bodies, they made themselves his own. Thereafter the friend was watching over the sleep of the friend⁶¹.

The stanza tells us that the sacrificers accompanied by their wives (their physical as well as spiritual complement) approached worshipfully the supreme fire, prepared to hand themselves over to him in order to reach through him, who is the door, the supreme abode; whereafter they rest immersed

60. “tam in naro vi hvayante samīke ririkvāmsas tanvaḥ kṛṇvata trām/ mitho yat tyāgam ubhayāso agman naras tokasya tanayasya sātāu.”

61. “samjānānā upa sidann abhijñu patnivanto namasyaṁ namasyan/ ririkvāmsas tanvaḥ kṛṇvata svāḥ sakhā sakhyur nimiṣi rakṣamānāḥ.”

in the immortal waters, as if they were asleep, while the supreme fire watches benevolent over their divine rest. Notice that the text speaks in the singular: *over the sleep of the friend* and not over the sleep of the friends, for the bosom of the waters does not take place without an abandonment of multiplicity. The attainment of the supernal sun is also set in relation with the deep sleep in (by) the Upaniṣads. See, for instance, *Chandogya Upaniṣad*. 8.6.3:

And when a man is asleep, reposing, and at perfect rest, so that he sees no dream, then he has entered into those "nādis." Then no evil touches him for he has obtained the light (of the Sun).

I wonder whether *Rg Veda* 10.93.5 does not make reference to the same thing:

And (bring) us by night to the abode of the waters, O skilful Sun and Moon, our fellow-travellers, when Ahi Budhnya sits in their company (to wit, in the company of the waters), there in the depths.⁶²

Regarding the attainment of unity in the highest plane I find the words of 1.155.5 very suggestive:

The mortal wanders having seen two steps of him who looks like the sun. The third one nobody dares to approach, not even the winged birds in their flight⁶³.

By the winged birds one has to understand the gods. Sāyaṇa speaks concretely of the Maruts. Not only men but even the very gods cannot approach this highest step of Viṣṇu in their normal form. To reach there it is necessary that they give up their bodies, their separate identities. Thus another stanza (1.46.9), after pointing out the celestial emplacement of Soma and the Good, asks the Aśvins where do they intend to leave their bodies, as indicating the necessity of giving up individuality before being able to reach there. It says :

In the abode of heaven are the drops of Soma, in the abode of the rivers, the Good. Where do you intend to place your natural bodily form ?⁶⁴.

62. "uta no naktam apām vṛṣṇvasū sūryamāsā sadanāya sadhanyā/sacā yat sady eṣām ahir budhneṣu budhnyah."

63. 'dve id asya kramaṇe swardṛṣo 'bhikhyāya martyo bhuraṇyati/tṛṭiyam asya nakir ā dadharṣati vayaś cana patayantaḥ patatrinaḥ."

64. "divas...indavo vasu sindhūnām padc/svam vavriṁ kuba dhitsathaḥ."

In the same order of ideas the *Atharva Veda* (4.11.6) speaks of the ascension of the heaven while leaving their bodies behind.

One of the sacrificial formulae of the Brāhmaṇas concerning the mystical reconstitution of the victim, symbol of Puruṣa/Prajāpati, identifies this reconstitution with the actual effacement of every aspect of form:

*O divine Tvaṣṭṛ, let your ample (forms) closely unite together, that it be uniform what is of different shape*⁶⁵.

The contrast between all these and those speaking of plurality in the bosom of ṛta calls for an explanation which can be sought in different directions. A first attempt at solution would be to eliminate the problem by somehow reducing one member of the opposition to the other. Another possibility would be to insist on the contrary in the contrast, in the opposition, taking it as an exponent of doctrinal in the Veda. A third and more nuanced solution consists in showing the ultimate complementarity of the two standpoints, which can refer to various situations and attitudes of the conscious being (whether divine or human) with respect to the supreme ṛta. Let us go over these various ways of looking at the problem.

As we have just said one can simply eliminate the problem by assimilating the two terms of the binomial of opposition. This can be done by giving a metaphorical value to those texts that speak of multiplicity in the supreme plane, taking as justification for this way of proceeding the fact that the Śruti often prescribes in terms of multiplicity that which is really one. Among the passages that show this peculiarity we like to quote the following ones:

1.32.11 *The waters, the wives of the Dāsa, that are guarded by the dragon, were obstructed, like the cows by the Paṇi*⁶⁶.

The wives of the Dāsa and the cows of the Paṇi are exactly the same, to wit, the celestial waters guarded by Ahi. The comparison reduces therefore itself to an identity, as Bergaigne has also understood:

65. *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* 8,20, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.8.3.37.

66. "dāsapatnir ahigopā ariṣṭhan niruddhā āpaḥ paṇineva gāvaḥ..."

"The author of verse 1.3².11 compares the waters kept by Ahi/Vṛtra to the cows kept by the Paṇi. It goes without saying that these cows themselves represent the waters or the dawns."⁶⁷

Other verses speaking of just a mythical difference are:

3.33.3 *I have come to the most maternal river (the Śutudri). we have attained the broad and blessed Vipās, which lick each other like the cow and itself, while flowing together along the same bed*⁶⁸.

The difference between the two rivers flowing together along the same bed cannot possibly be taken as real.

5.69.1 *The three spheres of light and the three heavens you support, O Mitra and Varuṇa*⁶⁹.

In spite of the conjunction "uta" which means *and* one cannot make any real distinction between *the three spheres of light* (trī rocanā) and *the three heavens* (trīn dyūn) of which the stanza speaks.

6.36.3 *Like the rivers (flow) into the sea, thus enter the praises. strengthened by the eulogies, into the widely spacious (Indra)*⁷⁰.

The distinction made by the text between "gir" and "uktha", *praise and eulogy*, is purely conventional, so that this stanza illustrates also clearly the 'mythical' difference to which we are referring. An extremely typical example of it is found in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 4.1.3.19 where a formula addressed to Vāyu and Indra together is commented on in the following terms :

As to why he says "You for the closely united" he who is Vāyu is Indra; and he who is Indra is Vāyu: therefore he says: "You for the closely united:"

Understanding the passages that speak of multiplicity in the bosom of ṛta in a metaphorical sense one eliminates at once the difficulty created by these texts when confronted with those other texts speaking of the attainment of unity in the same bosom of the Truth. But it is highly doubtful whether

67. A. Bergaigne, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 319.

68. "acchā sindhuṃ mātṛtamām ayāsam vipāsam urvīm subhagām aganma/vatsam iva mātārā samrīhāṇe samānam yonim anu samcaranti."

69. "trī rocanā varuṇa trīm uta dyūn... mitra dhārayatho..."

70. "...samudraṃ na sindhava ukthasusmā uruvyacasam gira ā viśanti."

this procedure be valid, even though it may not be invalid in some concrete cases. Thus one cannot remain satisfied with it, but has to look for other possible solutions. One of the easiest would be to admit that there is precisely no such solution, and that it is impossible to reconcile the various texts with each other. This is an alternative destined to please all those who search for indications of doctrinal inconsistency in the Veda, just as the first one is destined to please all those who systematically try to give a Vedāntic interpretation to it. But if this is the only alternative, then what about those Upaniṣadic texts that speak now of unity and now of multiplicity in the bosom of Brahman? Applying the same criterion it would be necessary to extend the same law of contradiction to them also. And if they can be exempted from it, why should the Vedas only incur it? That is something to be borne in mind, for one can certainly discover the same apparent contradiction within the Upaniṣads themselves. We would like to make this point clear by adducing two different passages. The first is taken from *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.1,2-6 which speaks of the existence of Brahman, and multiplicity of those who attain the highest knowledge. It says :

And if they should say to him : "Now with regard to that city of Brahman and the small ether within the heart, what is there within that deserves to be sought for, or that is to be understood.

Then he should say: "As large as this ether is so large is that order within the heart. Both heaven and earth are contained in it, both fire and air, both sun and moon, both lightning and stars."

And if they should say to him : "If everything that exists is contained in that city of Brahman, all beings and all desires, then what is left of it, when old age reaches it and scatters it or when it falls to pieces ?"

Then he should say: "By the old age of the body, that does not age; by the death of the body, that is not killed. That is the true Brahma-city. In it all desires (and all beings) are contained. It is the Self free from old age, from death and grief, which desires nothing but what it ought to desire."

Those who depart from hence, without having discovered the Self and those true desires, for them there is no freedom in all the worlds.

But those who depart from hence, after having discovered the Self and those true desires, for them there is freedom in all the worlds.

In contrast with this passage, *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.3.8-9 speaks in a very graphical way of the suppression of every kind of multiplicity in the highest sphere of being and knowledge. It says:

As the flowing rivers disappear in the sea, losing their name and their form, thus a wise man, freed from name and form, goes to the Divine Person, who is greater than the great.

He who knows that highest Brahman becomes even Brahman. Free from the fetters of the heart, he becomes immortal.

To ponder the value of the different texts speaking either of unity or of multiplicity in the highest plane, both in the Vedas and in the Upaniṣads, is undoubtedly a difficult task. First of all because one can approach the problem from different angles and to choose among the various standpoints is already a problem. For to choose is somehow to exclude and it is not always easy to make such an exclusion. Personally I think that it would be quite arbitrary to exclude beforehand a traditional interpretation like that of Vedānta for example, just because one sympathizes more with another type of interpretation. And this for two main reasons : first of all because it is more difficult than it appears to be to find positive reasons to globally reject the hermeneutical system of Vedānta and in the second place because it is perfectly plausible to understand the message both of Vedas and Upaniṣads by the light of all those texts speaking of the attainment of unity in the supreme plane, whatever explanation one might have to give of the apparently contradictory passages or texts. For the doctrine of the non-dual Brahman in the case of the Upaniṣads as well as the doctrine of the devouring character of the sacrifice in its ascending phase in the case of the Vedas, (cf. chapter V), offer more than a sufficient basis to construe such an interpretation.

To me the Vedic and Upaniṣadic texts speaking either of unity or of multiplicity in the supreme plane are not contradictory but rather contemporary, in the sense that they speak of different situations and attitudes of the conscious being (human or divine) with respect to the ultimate reality. I would sum-

arize my point of view in the following terms : there are two ways of going to ṛta, to the waters, to the highest reality : one is in order to enter there, to rest there, in short, in order to attain the original unity, to reconstruct Puruṣa/Prajāpati; the other is simply in order to obtain something from there, to take something out of there, in its capacity as source of all good and wealth. The former implies the abandonment of all multiplicity, not the latter. To the former the texts that speak of the attainment of unity make reference, to the latter a good number of passages speaking of plurality in the seat of ṛta, in the bosom of the Truth; the remainder of such passages regards the creative aspect of the same Truth, in its aspect of 'womb of the world of all multiplicity.'

Going to ṛta, in the waters,...in the second way implies a certain spiritual conquest, but not ultimate one, although it is not contradictory with it, since even after enlightenment one can go there in that particular manner, *for the benefit of others*, "śubhe kam", as gods and pitṛs are supposed to do in the Vedic perspective.

The ascension to the supreme plane when it is to really penetrate into it, without any ulterior purpose, implies the loss of the individuality, or as the Veda graphically says, the abandonment of the body, the death within the bosom of the mother or in the womb of the father...In that sense *R̥g Veda* 4.24.3; 1.72.5 and *Atharva Veda* 4.11.6 speak, as we have seen, of the necessity of abandoning the 'own bodies' to attain the supreme abode, while *R̥g Veda* 1.164.32 speaks of the male that dies in the bosom of the mother after having a number of children. On the other side 5.47.3 tells us about the womb of the father as the place into which penetrate a bull, a bird, a sea, namely, Soma. In the same order of ideas 8.9.21 describes the father's womb as the place where the Aśvins stop, while 1.164.30 tells us about the immobilisation that the spiritual being, endowed with breath and movement, experiences in the midst of the supreme abodes.

To ascend to the supreme plane in order to attain the original unity means to undo what one has done, to go back the way one has followed :

*The fathers, says 10.56.4, have folded back what they had unfolded.*⁷¹

There is however, as pointed out, another way of climbing up the supreme heights and this is by way of conquest, in order to obtain something that one wants to bring down with oneself. The ascension, however, is full of danger and it is not always easy to reach the summit unhurt, as in the case narrated by 5.78. 5-6. Often a fatal mistake may cause the climbing person to fall down into a sombre abyss, from which only the divine help can rescue him. Hence the anguished prayers of the ṛṣi Saptavadhri that we have mentioned in the last chapter, as well as the similar prayers of so many sacrificers succoured by the Aśvins in parallel circumstances. See 1.116.24, 1.117.4-5, 1.117.24, etc.

The two possible ends of the ascent to the celestial heights are distinguished by Ananda Coomaraswamy in the following terms : "But it is clear also that for *him who understands* (ya evaṁ vidvān) there is implied not merely a taking possession of these worlds, but a symbolic journeying to the Fountain of Life, upstream, to find there a full catharsis (avabhṛtam abhi-vedya)."⁷²

The double finality of the ascension to the seat of ṛta, of the Truth, corresponds to the double finality of meditation as acknowledged by the Vedānta, a meditation that has as only goal the total penetration of the mystery of being and another type of meditation which merely envisages the attainment of concrete goods or of psychic powers, the so-called siddhis. This parallelism shows under another light the deep coincidence of Vedas and Upaniṣads, on which traditional exegesis has always insisted.

71. "mahīmna cṣām pītarāś caneśīre devā deveṣv adadhur api kratum/sam avivyacur uta yāny atviṣur aiṣām tanūsu ni yiviṣuḥ punaḥ,"

72. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *The Rg Veda as Land Nama-Bok*, p. 20.

CHAPTER VII

A CONTROVERSIAL POINT

From what has been said up to now it is abundantly clear that man, according to the Vedas, can attain the supreme goal by the path of the sacrifice. This soteriological aspect of the Vedic ritual is set by Gonda in relation with the soteriological sense which in later Hinduism the construction and dedication of a temple has. Let us repeat his words :—

“Notwithstanding the important studies of Eggeling on the one hand and of Hubert and Mauss on the other modern scholars have long not only failed to understand the important *psychological* and *soteriological* aspects of the Vedic “śrauta” ritual, but also missed the community of aims, intentions and interests between the man who had, in accordance with the Vedic rite, the sacrificial fire-place built and the Hindu who bore the expenses of the erection of a temple and, hence, overlooked, in a very important religious culture trait, resemblance, identity and, if I am not mistaken, continuity. The very complicated construction of the great Vedic fire-place is the expression of the periodical reintegration of the Primeval Being...The periodical ritual acts reflect and are identical with the everproceeding process of renewal of all cosmic life and matter. At the same time the *patron* or performer of the rite, i.e. the “yajamāna” or *sacrificer*, is identical with Prajāpati, and it is here that the psychological and soteriological aspects of the rite become manifest. That is to say, if the sacrificer follows, in his mind, the construction of the fire-place in the ritually correct way, he undergoes a modification of his status, a renewal of his personality, a spiritual rebirth. To the present day educated Indian traditionalists like to emphasize that this transformation of the personality, this self-realization, is the essence and deeper significance of a ritual act, whether Vedic

or post-Vedic, the highest object of the performer's endeavour, whether he had a fire-place built or a temple erected. As we now know,—it is true, mainly through some comparatively recent studies on Hindu ritual and temple cult—those who see deeper than the ordinary man who presents his offerings to the image of the god, are convinced that the temple essentially is the expression of the same idea of reintegration. The construction of a temple...means the materialisation of the highest principle. In the structure, which is not essentially different from other so-called sacred figures, the ritually prepared worshipper who pays the cost of the erection will experience an *existential* contact with the Highest, with Brahman, which in this respect has taken over the role played by Prajāpati in the preceding period. It may be recalled that, for instance, the sacrificial material retained its time-honoured virtue, even when, in later times, temples were built of stone or timber, for those materials continued to be called “*iṣṭakā*”, which was the Vedic name of the great *fire altar*.¹

As Jung says, “the symbolism of the rites of renewal, if taken seriously, points far beyond the mere archaic and infantile... The rites are attempts to abolish the separation between the conscious mind and the unconscious, the real source of life, and bring about a reunion of the individual with the native soil of his inherited, instinctive make-up. Had these rites of renewal not yielded definite results they would not only have died out in prehistoric times, they would never have arisen in the first place.”²

The controversial point to which we are referring in this chapter does not concern the possibility of attaining the ultimate by means of the sacrifice, according to the Vedas—which is out of question—, but to what extent this Vedic doctrine is admissible or not from the standpoint of the Upaniṣads and the later tradition, leaving aside the partisan interpretations of the epoch of the schools.

According to Paul Deussen the oldest Upaniṣads concede only a relative recognition to the ritual system of the Vedas

1. J. Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, pp. 17-19.

2. C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, pp. 129-130

and Brāhmaṇas, restricting its value to the obtainment of goods which are in the last instance transient and denying to it in the practice a really transcendent value. It is only later, when the Upaniṣads become fully integrated in the Veda, so as to form its terminal portion or "Vedānta", that the situation somehow changes and one discovers a more amicable attitude towards the sacrificial cult. The key for the understanding of this change would be given according to Deussen in the controversy of *Maitrī Upaniṣad* 7.8-10 against the heretical. "Brahminism, in view of the consequences which the attitude of the earlier Upaniṣads had entailed in Buddhism and similar manifestations, returns—says Deussen—to its original position."³

If this is so, how to explain certain texts of the Brāhmaṇas and even of the Vedas, which deny the soteriological efficacy of the sacrifice in a way no less impressive than some of the Upaniṣads do? And how to explain on the other hand that besides the texts which can be called derogatory of the ritual we find in the very same Upaniṣads other passages which present the liturgical sacrifice as a way to attain Brahman? Here are some of these remarkable contrasts within the Scriptures and the Tradition, by overlooking which one is bound to have a very partial view about the soteriological aspects of the Karma-mārga according to the Śruti and the Smṛti.

While the *Rg Veda* (2.21.5) tells us that the Uśij found in Indra, symbol here of the highest plane, the cows and the treasure, after having discovered the way by virtue of the sacrifice and while 1.40. 7-8 presents the sacrificer who ascends towards the supreme sphere as becoming in due course Indra himself, the verse 8.70 3 tells us explicitly that one does not attain Indra by means of the works and the sacrifices;—

He who sacrifices never reaches him with the sacrificial work, one does not (reach) the always furthering Indra with the sacrifices, him, the praised of all, the masterly, the irresistible, of intrepid

3. Cf. P. Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads*, pp. 60-65.

power.⁴

Here is another interesting contrast : while the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* speaks in many places of the attainment of the supreme world on the part of the sacrificers⁵, in 10.5.4.16 it seems to reject this doctrine in the most emphatic way. It says in effect :—

By knowledge they climb upwards, thither where desire is quenched. No sacrificial gift reaches there nor penance of the ignorant. For that world cannot be won by sacrificial gifts nor by asceticism. For only to him who knows does this state belong.

A highly remarkable contrast is the one offered by various passages of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*. While 1.2.7, 1.2.9 and 1.2.10 represent (as is stressed over and over again) one of the crudest criticisms of the path of the works or of the sacrifice, 3.1.4 tells us in the most categorical manner that the sacrificer who delights himself in the ātman is the first of the knowers of Brahman :—

“Ātma-kṛiḍa ātma-ratiḥ kriyāvān eṣa brahmavidāṁ variṣṭhaḥ.”

The sacrificer who sports in the Self, who delights in the Self, is the first of the knowers of Brahman.

Śaṅkara, feeling somewhat embarrassed by this text, finds an accommodatitious explanation saying that it simply refers to the previous performance of meditation and other acts conducive to knowledge. The stanza however does not speak of the past but of the present and tells us categorically that it is the sacrificer who delectates himself in the ātman, and not just a meditator, that knows Brahman best, just as the *Gītā* affirms in a different context that *Renunciation and performance of action both lead to freedom ; of the two, performance of action is superior to the renunciation of action.*⁶

The adjectives “ātma-kṛiḍaḥ” and “ātma-ratiḥ” have of course to be taken as restricting the general meaning of

4. “nakiṣ ṭam karmanā naśad yaś cakāra, sadāvṛdham/indram na yaj-ñair viśvagūrtam ṛbhvasam adhrṣṭam dhṛṣṇvojasam.”

5. Cf. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 4.6.4.3, 4.6.4.5, 4.6.2.1, 4.6.9.12-13 et passim.

6. *Bhagavad Gītā* 5.2.

“kriyāvān” in that passage, but they cannot be taken as suppressing it in any way something that a certain prejudice in many translators often prevents the reader from realizing.

Not less interesting than the previous quotation are the verses 1.1.7 and 1.1.8 of the same Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, which have to be taken together :—

As a spider sends forth and draws in (its thread)..., so from the Imperishable arises here the universe.

By tapas Brahman expands. From that, food is produced, from food, life, mind, the relative, the worlds—and, in the sacrifices, the immortality.

The second stanza exemplifies the circular sense which the work of Brahman has in accordance with what is said in the first stanza. All the enumerated productions present themselves to us as ordained to the final attainment of immortality, the goal of the entire creation. What is however more interesting from our standpoint is that this immortality is directly set in relation with the works, the sacrifices. What in the descending phase is the “tapas” of Brahman, in the ascending phase, the phase of return, seems to be the cultural work. On similar doctrinal contrasts not in the same Upaniṣad, but in different ones, cf., P. Deussen *op. cit.* pp. 54-61.

The same sort of doctrinal contrast can be found in the Gītā, which, in spite of belonging only to the Smṛti or Tradition is however generally considered as an authority. Here are some of these contrasts. While the verses 45, 46 and 49 of the second chapter, for example, seem to subordinate in their way of speaking the Veda to the Vedānta and the path of action to the path of contemplation, the verses 23, 24 and 31 of chapter four and verse 16 of chapter 9, for example, affirm in the most clear way the possibility of attaining Brahman by the path of the sacrifice, if not otherwise, for the simple reason that the entire sacrificial action is also Brahman. They say :—

Of one unattached, liberated, with mind absorbed in knowledge, performing the sacrifice, his entire karma melts away.

The oblation is Brahman, the clarified butter is Brahman,

offered by Brahman in the fire of Brahman ; unto Brahman verily he goes who cognizes the sacrifice as Brahman (Karma-brahma-samādhinā).

The eaters of amṛta, the remnant of the sacrifice, go to the eternal Brahman.

I am...the sacrifice, I am the offering..., I am the mantra, I am also the clarified butter, I am the fire, I am the oblation.

The way in which Deussen and so many others explain this type of doctrinal contrasts in regard to the Upaniṣads, etc., apart from being questionable in itself, misses the point basically and completely, for the true problem which all these passages raise is not how to know the difference of outlook about the path of works at different times—the main topic of their discussion—, but how these various standpoints can be harmonized once admitted as canonical in the body of the Scriptures. Needless to say that any believer of the Śruti, not to speak of the two Mīmāṃsās, the traditional schools of Hindu hermeneutics, perceive the problem in this way, for it is obvious that it is the only relevant point with respect to the most fundamental assumption of the Tradition in regard to the Śruti, namely, its “prāmāṇya” or *validity*. To know what has been said in such and such an epoch about the sacrifice in its soteriological aspect may be quite important for the history of Vedic thought, but it is not at all enough for a true theology of the Śruti, which has to seriously ponder how the various formulations of a certain doctrinal point given in the course of time can be reconciled or not with each other and with the rest of Scriptures.

It is not our intention to present a solution to this problem that has agitated the Indian mind for centuries. What we want is just to point out certain lines in which the solution of the problem could be attempted.

There are in the Śruti certain passages which enable one to build a kind of bridge between the extremist positions that both Mīmāṃsakas and Vedāntins take in regard to the problem with which we are here concerned. It is of this kind of third position that we want to speak now, merely pointing out its possibility.

According to Ānanda Coomaraswamy the Brāhmaṇas draw a sharp distinction between "a mere performance" of the ritual and "a comprehension" of it, "the mere participant securing only the immediate and the comprehensor (evamvid, vidvān, viduḥ) both ends of the operation"⁷, that is to say, the temporal and the eternal goods.

The Rg Veda on its part asks itself how it is possible to please the gods without understanding : *how can the deficient in knowledge serve you ?*⁸ and prays Agni to distinguish clearly between the understanding and the lack of understanding of the mortals : *May the expert distinguish between comprehension and incomprehension*⁹. On the other side the verse 6.1.9 affirms implicitly that only he who understands the sacrifice deeply obtains from Agni all goods : *Who with the help of the prayers understands deeply the sacrificial rites, he (alone) receives all good, with Your assistance*.¹⁰

In this same order of ideas I.164.22 says that nobody reaches the immortal plane without a specific knowledge : *None gains it who does not know the Father*.¹¹

If this is so, it follows that a mere performance of the rites is not enough to obtain the supreme good ; the full understanding of what one is doing is an equally indispensable condition. It is therefore possible that the passages speaking of an impossibility of attaining the "summum bonum" by means of the sacrifice may refer to the actual impossibility of reaching this highest good by means of a merely material performance of the rites. In fact many of these texts throw into relief the relation between the incapability of attaining the supreme goal by means of the sacrificer. Thus, for example, *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* 10.5.4.16, already quoted, says : *No sacrificial gift reaches there, nor penance of the ignorant*.

This is just a first way of approaching the problem.

7. A. Coomaraswamy, *Ātmayajña*, Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, vol. 6, Feb. 1942.

8. "kathā vidhātṛ apracetāḥ." (1.120.1)

9. "cittim acittim cinavad vi vidvān..." (4.2.11)

10. "...ya āhutam pari vedā namobhir viśvet sa vāmā dadhate tvotaḥ."

11. "...tan non naśad yaḥ pitaram na veda."

There are others. In general one can say that the comprehension of what one is doing is only a first condition ; apart from that a special internal attitude is also required. Speaking of this point Ananda Coomaraswamy says :

"The Brāhmaṇas abound with evidence that the victim is a representation of the sacrificer himself, or as the texts express it, *is the sacrificer himself*. In accordance with the universal rule that initiation (dikṣā) is a death and a rebirth, it is explicit that *the initiate is the oblation* (havir vai dikṣitaḥ), *the victim* (paśu), *substantially the sacrificer himself*. That was to be expected for it is repeatedly emphasized that *we* (the sacrificers here and now) *must do what was done by the gods* (the original sacrificers) *in the beginning*. To sacrifice and to be sacrificed are essentially the same : *For the gods' sake he chose death, for his offspring's sake chose not immortality : they made Bṛhaspati the sacrifice, Yama gave up* (poured or emptied out) *his own dear body*."¹²

According to this to sacrifice, at least in the full sense of the word, does not merely consist in presenting offerings, but it implies to present oneself as offering. The very name of "yajamāna", which the sacrifice ordinarily receives and which has an essentially reflexive meaning (being as it is the present participle of the "ātmanepada," the reflexive middle voice of the Sanskrit) alludes to that. There are in the *Rg Veda* a series of texts which allude or seem to allude to this point. The lacunae which the authors of the verses 1.7.7 and 8.9.6 find in the mere presentation of hymns of praise to Indra or to the Aśvins, makes reference not only to the necessity of performing a fuller sacrifice than that of mere lauds, but also, I think, to the necessity of accompanying it with a spirit of self-immolation. Whatever it is, the self-immolation forms definitely part of the integral sacrifice of which 6.38.4 speaks in enlightening words :

May the sacrifice and the Soma increase Indra, may the songs, the praises and mantras also increase him. May you specially increase

12. A. Coomaraswamy, *b*

him at the arrival of the dawn from the darkness. The months, the autumns, the days, all must increase Indra.¹³

According to what this verse says it is necessary that everything increase Indra, that everything be sacrificed to him, not excluding oneself. As a matter of fact everything is actually sacrificed to Indra in the ascending phase of the sacrifice, according to what has been said in chapter V.

The ascension to the seat of ṛta should not be just for the sake of causing something to come down therefrom, but for the sake of staying and remaining there. However there are few who understand this necessity, hence the lament of the author of 3.53.24 :

Indra! These sons of Bharata know only well the descent, not the end of the race. They urge their own horse, as it were a stranger, they (only) lead him around in circles during the running-match, him, who is swift as the bow's string¹⁴.

Not only they themselves do not want to rest in the seat of ṛta, but they constantly oblige their own messenger and conveyance, Agni, to circulate restlessly to attain again and again the transient goods.

The interior oblation of which the penultimate quotation speaks does not basically differ from what the later tradition has called *subjective interior burnt-offering* (ādhyañmikam āntaram agnihotram), except in the fact of having its support in the external rite. But this is not evidently an essential difference. In any case it is rightly considered by the later tradition as the only element which really confers sense to the external rite :

If one sacrifices, knowing not this Agnihotra, it is for him as though he pushed aside the coals and made an oblation in the ashes.

There is no reason in the world why the ritual sacrifice, performed with an understanding mind and with a real inter-

13. "vardhād yaṁ yajña uta soma indraṁ vardhād brahma gira ukthā ca manma/vardhāhainam uśaso yāman naktor vardhān māsāḥ śarado dyāva indram."

14. "ima indra bharatasya putrā apapitvaṁ cikitur na prapitvam/hinvanti aśvam arāṇaṁ na nityaṁ jyāvājaṁ pari ṇayanty ājau."

nal attitude of self immolation, should not be a perfect way of attaining enlightenment. In fact, the *Maitrāyaṇa Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad* (6.38) states clearly that *He who offers the Agnihotra (understood as external ritual plus internal attitude) breaks through the net of desire. Then, cutting through bewilderment, never approving of anger, meditating on one desire (that of liberty), he breaks through the shrine of Brahman with its four nets and proceeds thence to the other. For having there broken the spheres of the sun, the moon, the fire and goodness, he, then, being purified himself, beholds dwelling in goodness, immovable, immortal, indestructible, firm, bearing the name of Viṣṇu, the highest abode, endowed with love and truth and omniscience, the self-dependent Intelligence, standing in its own greatness. And here they quote :*

"In the midst of the sun stands the moon, in the midst of the moon the fire, in the midst of the fire goodness, in the midst of goodness the Eternal."

Having meditated on him who has the breadth of a thumb within the span (of the heart) in the body, who is smaller than the small, he obtains the nature of the highest; there all desires are fulfilled.

Nobody can deny that the liturgical sacrifice can be a path to enlightenment without peremptorily denying the truth of the Veda, sacred to the Tradition, since it is evident that for the Vedic ṛṣis the sacrifice was considered as the normal way to attain the highest religious experience, even if in more than one occasion they seem to equate it with mere contemplation, which they also designate at times with the name of sacrifice. Here are a series of quotations highly interesting in this respect.

1.186.11 *May this meditation of ours (asme dīdhitiḥ) be for you. O adorable ones, almost like the breath (apiprāṇī) and causing you to stay¹⁵.*

1.186.1 *May god Savitṛ come to our synod on account of the worship and the divine praise, he who belongs to all men. In order that you, O youthful ones, may place us in a rapturous mood, may the meditation (manīṣā) come down to the world at nightfall.¹⁶*

15. "iyam sā vo asme dīdhitiḥ yajatrā apiprāṇī ca sadanī ca bhūyāḥ..."

16. "ā na ilābhīr vidathe suṣṭi viśvānaraḥ savitā deva etu/api yathā yuvāno matsathā no viśvaṁ jagat abhipitve manīṣā."

6.13.4 *Whichever mortal, O Sun of Strength, gets to kindle you from himself (niśitīm vedyā ānaṭ), with the help of the songs, the hymns and the worship, he earns all good O Agni, O God !*¹⁷

The "sensus plenior" of this stanza is easily understood by reading the following passage of the *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* (7.4.1.1):

Being about to build Agni (the fire-altar), he takes him up into his own self; for from out of his own self he causes him to be born; and wherefrom one is born, suchlike he becomes. Now were he to build up Agni without taking him up into his own self, he would beget man from man, mortal from mortal, one not freed from sin from one not freed from sin; but when he builds up Agni after taking him up into his own self, he causes Agni to be born from Agni, the immortal from the immortal, the sinless from the sinless.

4.2.6 *When one sweating brings fuel to you or makes his head hot on account of you, be for him a powerful protector, O Agni !*¹⁸

2.41.18 *Accept these prayers, O Saraswati, the mantras that the Gṛtsamadas bring as sacrifice*¹⁹.

7.104.6 *Indra and Soma ! Let this hymn encompass you on all sides, (the hymn) that I bring forward to you as a sacrifice, according to my wisdom*²⁰.

6.16.47 *We bring you, O Agni, with this verse an oblation which has been fashioned in the heart. Let this be your oxen, your bulls and cows*²¹.

The equivalence that this last text establishes between the oblation of the mantra, that is to say, of the inspired word and thought, centre of the contemplation, and the ritual sacri-

17. "yas te sūno sahaso gīrbhir ukthair yajñair marto niśitīm vedyānaṭ/ viśvaṁ sa deva prati vāram agne dhatte..."

18. "yas ta idhmaṁ jabharat siṣvidāno mūrdhānaṁ vā tatapate tvāyā/ bhuvas tasya svatavāṁ pāyur agne..."

19. "imā brahma sarasvati juṣasva.../yā te manma gṛtsamadā...juhvati."

20. "indrāsomā pari vām bhūtu viśvata iyaṁ matiḥ.../yaṁ vām hotrām parihinomi medhayā..."

21. "ā te agne ṛcā havir hṛdā taṣṭaṁ bharāmasi/te te bhavantūkṣana ṛabbhāso vaśā uta."

fice is not a sort of merciful concession to the poor sacrificers who were not able to bear the expenses of the solemn ritual, as it is often said, but the result of a deep understanding of the identity of nature between the interior and the exterior offering, an understanding which reflects itself over and over again in the frequent equation made by the texts between the prayer or meditative thought and the material oblations, especially the Soma. This is a point which already Bergaigne did emphasize in his book on the Vedic Religion. Says he :

"The prayers are...assimilated to the various offerings. We read in verse 10.76.7, cf. 6, that men purify somehow the offerings with their mouth...Let us still quote the passages where the prayers addressed to different gods are compared to the clarified butter, 8.39.3, 5.12.1, to the butter sacrificed with the spoon 1.110.6, hence those daring expressions *I prepare the hymn for Indra with the spoon* (1.61.5) and *I sacrifice with the spoon to the Ādityas these songs that distil butter* (2.27.1)..."

"The hymn, or more generally, the sacred word, is a nourishment which the priest offers to Mitra and Varuṇa, 10.30.1, cf. 7.64.5. It is like a favourite dish, 1.61.1-2, or more generally an offering that he presents to Indra, 8.55.11, or even to Soma, 9.103.1. And indeed the hymns intoxicate Indra, 8.53.1, they are like the first glasses of liquor to Agni, 8.92.6. The offering of the hymn in verse 2.41.18 is expressed by the verb "hu", and in verse 8.52.4 by the word "homan", which on the other hand is never employed except to indicate the real offering. Lastly, in verse 6.16.47, the hymn, designated by the name of offering made with the heart, must take the place of bulls and cows for Agni. It is also in the same way that the cows with eight feet, the offering of which Agni receives (āhutaḥ), 2.7.5, cannot represent but the prayers. In the verse Vāl. 2.4 the prayers and the offerings...exchange their functions, the former distil a savoury liquid, while the latter call upon Indra."²²

Between prayers and offerings there is perfect identity. It is not, as Lüders also says, that the prayers or hymns were

22. A. Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique*, vol I, pp. 283-284, 313-313.

like the spiritual nourishment of the gods, while the material oblations would constitute their physical nourishment. "This is thought in modern terms—he says. The *growing* through the songs stands on the same footing with the growing by means of the food offered in the sacrifice."²³ In other words, the ṛṣis do not make any essential difference between the material and the spiritual oblations, from which one can draw the conclusion that they had already discovered the value of the interior sacrifice or meditation, which, as pointed out, they do not hesitate to present to Agni instead of the customary bulls and cows. If this is so, one might ask, why such a preponderant emphasis on the external ritual? Perhaps because they had realized that the liturgy has a social value which pure meditation will never possess. Whatever it is, they neither rejected the one nor the other and the same should be expected of all those who claim to be their spiritual heirs.

To me the entire argumentation of modern exegesis and in another sense of the Vedānta on the Superiority attributed by the Upaniṣads to the path of wisdom over the path of works bases itself on the implicit assumption that words like "karma" or "yajña" have the same sense both in the passages speaking of the soteriological value of the sacrifice and in those that seem to deny it. Now this is an assumption which is not easy to prove and unless it is proved the force of the argumentation gets considerably diluted. Of course, it is equally difficult to prove that "karma" or "yajña" possess different values in the passages denying the soteriological sense of the sacrifice and in those that state it in an emphatic way, but as long as this possibility subsists the accusation of doctrinal inconsistency in the Śruti regarding the problem we are discussing cannot possibly be urged.

When one analyses the various usages of the word "yajña" in the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas, not to speak of the Upaniṣads, one realises the variety of meanings it includes and how often the distinction between the various shades of meaning in the texts is unclear.

23. H. Lüders, *Varuṇa*, p. 22.

Thus, for example, the Śruti does not hesitate to designate as sacrifice, (a) the construction of the fire-altar, (b) the mythical conquest of the celestial riches, (c) the mere oblation of Soma or clarified butter to the gods in the sacrificial fire, even though the construction of the fire-altar has admittedly a soteriological character, on account of its sacramental symbolism : the reconstruction of Prajāpati's body, whereas the conquest of the fire and the waters hardly differs in certain aspects from the famous mythical ascents of the shamans in search of celestial goods that they want to bring down from heaven, and the third ritual does not imply as the other two do any active participation of man. Yet the ṛsis do not hesitate to speak of "yajña" in all three cases and the Brāhmaṇas constantly mix up the three conceptions in the ritual, although it would be possible not only to separate them theologically—respecting the essential unity of the sacrifice—, but even ritually, for the three conceptions could serve perfectly well as bases for three different rituals, an idea, which, by the way, could be used with advantage in order to simplify the ritual and to give to it a greater intelligibility.

The habitual ambiguity of the word "yajña" in the Scriptures is by no means an isolated fact, for, as we have seen, most of the basic concepts of the Śruti partake in a greater or lesser degree of the same ambiguity, which, on the other side, does not seem to inhibit the ṛsis from moving with agility among the various shades of meaning. Thus in the case of the sacrifice the Brāhmaṇas do not fail to distinguish occasionally some of the varieties (of sacrifice) that we have mentioned above. Speaking, for example, of the difficult ascension to heaven or "dūrohaṇa" they specify that it can have a merely transitory character, when the ascent is followed by the descent, or else that it can have a really terminal, final character, in which case the sacrificer does not come back again to the earth, for he only wants the celestial world:

If one wants one world only, the celestial world, the priest must only perform the rite of ascension. Then one conquers the celestial world but one can no longer remain in this world (Āitareya Brāhmaṇa 18.7;

cf. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.9.3.1-8; cf. also *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 28.1.10-12, 19.5.4)

In a similar way it is said that the recitation of hundred and sixty verses is to obtain the sacrifice, whereas that of one thousand verses is to reach Heaven : *if one aspires to Heaven*. See *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 7.7. 1-8, 6.1.5. ss; *Kauṣṭhiki Brāhmaṇa* 11.5, *Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇa* 6.9.1-14.

Although these and other passages of the Brāhmaṇas distinguish the various ends of the ascension to the celestial heights and consequently various important types of sacrifice, one having as object the possession of these worlds and another the fulfilment of the sacrificer's whole life, the Śruti as a whole pays far greater attention to the varieties of sacrifice which are ritually important, as against those which are only theologically important with the result that the concept of sacrifice remains doctrinally ambiguous. Due to this ambiguity it is difficult to know the exact value of all those passages of the Scripture, which apparently at least deny the soteriological aspect of the sacrifice.

Personally I can hardly believe that the Upaniṣadic seers completely reject the soteriological value of rituals such as the construction of the fire-altar, with its profound sense of self-immolation, when even the Theravāda Buddhism, ordinarily so opposed to the Vedic tradition, admits the possibility of attaining Enlightenment, meditating for instance on the fire in the way the Vedic seers were doing and taking as a meditation-support the same designations of the fire, employed by the ṛṣis namely, *the Purifier* (pāvaka), *the Leaver of the Black Trail* (kaṇhavattani), *the Knower of Creatures* (jātaveda), *the altar of sacrifice* (hutāsana), etc.²⁴

As it is known this is one of the meditations with support, called "Kasiṇas", which the Theravāda tradition accepts, though recognizing its pre-Buddhistic character, not only to acquire the so-called "iddhis", but even Enlightenment, if one is able to attain the various intermediacy "jhānas" with their help.

24. Cf. *Visuddhimagga*, ch. V f.

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It would be really strange that while Theravāda Buddhism admits the possibility of attaining the summit of spirituality by means of these "meditations with support", which are the "Kasinas", the Upaniṣadic ṛṣis would simply discard the possibility of reaching it through the medium of this other kind of meditation with support, which is the liturgy, well understood and deeply lived.

CONCLUSION

To close our discussion on the Vedic sacrifice we would like to call the attention of the reader to a couple of points, of which he might be already fully aware, to wit, (a) the abundance of material that the *Rg Veda* offers for the formulation of a theology of the sacrifice, (b) the originality of the Vedic conception of the sacrifice.

The first point hardly needs any commentary to anyone who has perused the preceding pages. In spite of being a compilation of hymns without direct doctrinal intention the *Rg Veda* offers along with its collection of mantras a great number of precious indications for the construction of a theology of the sacrifice. Even though these indications may appear at first sight as a series of disconnected passages incapable of telling anything apart from the context that frames them, one is singularly surprised from the moment that one starts correlating them, for one sees rising before one's eyes a system of theology, harmonious and logical, which results spontaneously from the gathered material and coordinates it. One realizes then once more the fundamental unity of this common treasure of aphorisms, sentences, prayers and deep intuitions, which is the *Rg Veda* and which the Tradition has invested with such unrivalled canonical authority.

This abundance of data contrasts, it goes without saying, with the scarcity of data presented, for example, by the Zoroastrian or Christian canonical texts on the same theme, although the concept of sacrifice has a central importance to both these Traditions.

In the case of Zoroastrianism the scarcity of data regarding the Haoma-rite, joined to certain apparent condemnations of the same on the part of the Prophet, has even occasioned some to think of a surreptitious introduction of the

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rite from outside the Zoroastrian community. But this is most unlikely, for, as Zachner points out¹, it would be incomprehensible, that the sacrifice of the Haoma-plant, being from immemorial times the central religious act of Zoroastrianism, would have been introduced among the faithful without provoking the slightest protest, if, as it is said, the rite had been really denounced and outlawed by Zoroaster himself.

Much better is the situation in the case of Christianity, for there—though few—we have some very important statements about the eucharistic sacrifice in the canonical literature. Yet these data are so packed with various resonances and connotations that it is really difficult to have a clear idea of their total import. Of course, an average Christian may be satisfied with the thought that this scarcity of data is due, as it is often said, to the will of Jesus that his actions and words be interpreted by the disciples in the light of the later events and of their “ecclesial” experience, but this is scarce consolation for the Biblical theologians as well as for the students of Comparative Religions, who find it really difficult to pierce through the darkness surrounding a few luminous statements.

As for the Vedist the task is much easier, for the *Rg Veda* alone, leaving aside the ancillary literature of Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas and even, I would say, of the Upaniṣads, enables him to draw a clear picture at least in its general lines, of the meaning of the sacrifice in the ancient Indian Tradition.

After having briefly pointed out the abundance of data regarding the sacrifice in the *Rg Veda* let us say something about the other question, to wit, the extreme originality of the Vedic conception of the sacrifice.

As we have said before, this originality consists in the fact of making of the sacrifice, not only the central act of religion, but also the supreme principle of all things, the reality which overpowers entirely both the spiritual and the material creations, both the world of the gods and that of men.

1. R. C. Zachner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, p. 15.

This, in our opinion, does not represent a kind of apotheosis of ritualism, consequent on a growing preoccupation for ritual exactness coupled with an ever greater predominance of the priestly class. Still less does it represent, according to us, the triumph of a magical conception of the sacrifice, which would have finally subordinated the gods to the ritual that dominates them apparently. This conception is in the first place the result of a clear intuition of the famous "hermetic principle", unequivocally formulated in one of the Upaniṣads², according to which whatever is found in the creation must exist somehow in the creator, or in other words, must have in him a kind of radical existence partaking of the mystery and transcendence of the supreme Principle. It is due to this intuition only that the ṛṣis speak in so many places of the supreme essence, of the highest abode of the cow, of the bird, of the mother, of the fire, of Soma, of the sacrifice, etc., and of their secret and occult names. The eventually interchangeable character of some of these expressions³ tends to prove that all of them stand for designations of one and the same thing, namely, the First Principle, as the mysterious supreme abode of everything. This being so, it is but natural that the Vedic ṛṣis should have identified the sacrifice with the supreme Principle. But this is not all, for the ṛṣis insist qualitatively much more on this identification than on the others and this seems to imply that there must be some additional reasons for it. Among them we consider of the first importance the triumph of the deva-cult over the asura-cult within the priesthood. As a matter of fact this triumph demanded the elevation of the sacrifice to the category of supreme Principle, lest this highest Principle should be in fact indistinguishable from a

2. Cf. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.4.10 : *What is here, the same is there; and what is there the same is here.*

3. A. Bergaigne discusses at length this point in vol II, pp. 77-80, of his book *La Religion Védique*. He says, for example, that the four formulæ, which he translates by *place de la vache*, *place de l'oiseau*, *sommet de la tromperie* and *peau du dormeur* to be found in 4.5.7-12 are practically equivalent : "Tout ce passage 4.5.7-12 me paraît mettre hors de doute à la fois l'équivalence des quatre formules et l'idée de mystère qui s'y attache."

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totally asuric principle or entity, which, though accepting the sacrifice, does not involve itself in it, as pointed out in the first chapter. In Zoroastrianism, for instance, it is not Ahura Mazda who sacrifices himself for the redemption of the world, but his son Haoma, who according to Zaehner⁴ is primarily associated with the cult of the daevas. Had the highest Reality remained differentiated from the sacrifice in the Vedic tradition, what would have been the difference between it and the highest Reality as conceived by the Zoroastrians? Both would have practically coalesced, for the Zoroastrian conception of Ahura Mazda and his wives or Ahurānīs, which the Yasna 3.8.3 identifies with the celestial waters⁵, bears a tremendous resemblance to the Vedic conception of the Asura Varuṇa in the midst of the immortal waters, which seems to have embodied the original conception of the highest Reality among the most ancient ṛsis. No, such a conception could not remain unchanged without seriously jeopardizing the re-interpretation of the entire tradition in terms of the new theological orientation. The partisans of the deva-cult must have instinctively felt that the only way to eliminate its original asuric connotations from the highest Reality was to identify it with the sacrifice. And they have done it in different ways, transforming, for example, the waters from wives of the Dāsa/Dasyu into wives of Indra or appointed by Indra to a honourable husband, after a mythical combat that represents among other things their conversion to the sacrificial order. As for Varuṇa they have deprived him of his originally inauspicious character, not only by associating him with the sacrifice, but also by assimilating him to a deva and even to the deva *par excellence*, that is, Indra.

Regarding the originally inauspicious character of Varuṇa it is abundantly clear from certain passages of the Brāhmaṇas according to which Soma was at the beginning

4. R.C. Zaehner, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

5. *We venerate the waters, when they surge forward, come together, and flow forth, the wives (ahurānīs) of Ahura—beneficent, easy to cross, good to swim and bathe in, a gift for both the worlds.*

identical with the dangerous Varuṇa. As a matter of fact the ritual clearly identifies Soma with Varuṇa at the time of being bought from the Soma vendor and points out its inauspicious character, due to which all precautions should be taken in regard to it.⁶ Under these circumstances Soma hardly differs from Vṛtra and it is not surprising that it has been actually identified with him⁷. But just as the Veda speaks of the divorce of the Waters from the Dāsa/Dasyu and of their marriage to Indra, in the same way the ritual speaks of the transformation of Soma/Varuṇa into a luminous and auspicious entity after getting rid of asuric "varuṇa", thanks to his immolation. It is probably to this that 9.71.2 refers, when it says that Soma *casts off this asuric party that is his*, that is to say, that aspect of him which is connected with Varuṇa and the asuric world, and *goes to the rendez-vous with the Father*⁸. In stanza 8 of the same hymn Soma's "varuṇa" is said to assume a resplendent appearance, which can only refer to his change of party, for Soma in the course of the ritual passes from being an asuric inauspicious entity to be a daivic and highly auspicious reality, in fact, the oblation *par excellence*.

These myths among others⁹, point out clearly the urge felt by the Vedic ṛṣis to connect the supreme Reality with the order of the sacrifice in terms of their *practical* rejection of the asura-cult and of their adherence to the deva-cult. As a matter of fact the sacrifice and the highest Principle have been repeatedly identified in the Śruti. Remember only the frequent identification, found in the R̥g Veda, of the waters with ṛta, understood both as the sacred work and the Truth in matter

6. Cf. *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā* 3.7.8 *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* 6.1.11.4-5, *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 1.13.24-26, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.7.1.1, 3.3.4.10, *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā* 1.2.5, etc.

7. Cf. *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā* 3.7.8, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.4.3.13, 4.2.5.15.

8. "pra kriṣṭiḥeva śūṣa eti roruvad asuryaṁ varṇaṁ nī riṇite asya tam/ jahāti vavrim pitur eti niṣkṛtam upaprutam kṛṇute nirṇijaṁ tanā."

9. Other myths related to the same theme are in our opinion the myth of Indra's parricide and that of his coming out violently from his mother's womb. See on both points the comments of Bergaigne in his book *La Religion Vedique*, vol. II, p. 165, etc.

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of cult, which in the eyes of the Vedic Aryans was only the sacrifice. Remember again the extremely frequent identification made by the Brāhmaṇas of the Waters with the sacrifice. Think also of the constant identification made by the Śruti of Puruṣa/Prajāpati, understood as the highest Principle, with the sacrifice.

A minimum of logic demanded that, given the intimate connection of the concept of deva with the concept of sacrificial immolation, the supreme Reality was also conceived in the same manner, namely, as sacrificer and sacrifice. Now that demand has in fact been met with in many ways in the Śruti.

If the adherence to the deva-cult on the part of the orthodox priesthood has been one of the causes of the formulation of the highly original doctrine of the sacrifice as the First Principle of all things, the rejection of the same cult on the part of Zoroaster has brought about the formulation of a no less interesting doctrine from a theological point of view, namely, the doctrine of the original sin. Let us say something about it, not for the sake of making a digression, but for the sake of showing under another light the originality of the Vedic doctrine of the sacrifice.

The rejection of the deva-cult on the part of Zoroaster had as a consequence the rejection of the two great creative immolations associated with it, namely, the immolation of Puruṣa/Prajāpati on one side, and, on the other, the immolation of Yama, the divine Twin, who in imitation of them consents to sacrifice his immortality for the sake of progeny. We have already seen (Ch. I) how the Zoroastrian literature rejects the first creative immolation and attributes it to Ahri-man, the first of the daevas, who in the Zoroastrian context, unlike in the Vedic context, splits himself apart from the victim, among other reasons because it would not be fitting that the good consequences that Zoroastrianism, following in this point the previous tradition, attributes to this immolation, should fall back on the hideous and perverse Ahriman.

The rejection of the first great self-immolation is logically followed by the rejection of the second great self-immolation,

to wit, the self-sacrifice of Yama, so beautifully described in the verse 10.13.4 of the *Rg Veda* :

*For the god's sake (Yama) chose death, for his offspring's sake he did not choose immortality. (The gods) made the ṛṣi Bṛhaspati their sacrifice, Yama gave up (poured or emptied out) his own dear body.*¹⁰

Let us say in passing that the notion of self-immolation is very much the opposite of the concept of Asura, who is everywhere presented as a god, jealous of his prerogatives and not at all prepared to renounce them in any way. Accordingly, the notion of creation by self-immolation is substituted in the Zoroastrian context by the notion of creation by generation. The world is described in Zoroastrianism as a foetus of Ahura Mazdā, envisaged at the same time as father and mother of the creation. In contrast, the very idea of conception is clearly set in relation in the Vedic context with the idea of sacrifice, for as an Indian proverb of Vedic inspiration says: "the birth of the son is the death of the mother." Bearing all this in mind it is but logical that Yama had been considered a sinner in the Zoroastrian context, not only because he follows the example of Ahriman, immolating like him a bull that represents himself (if not otherwise by the simple reason that, as Warnach says, the victim stands everywhere for the very sacrificer), but also because he renounces besides the sublime prerogative of immortality to become the first mortal man, something—to say the least—incomprehensible in the eyes of any fervent devotee of a jealous god like Ahura Mazdāh. Of course, the Persian literature does not tell us all this in the same terms, but it says it in terms which enable us to elaborate it, taking account of the Vedic background of the various myths.

Let us try to put together the different pieces of information and discuss their meaning in some detail.

Yama/Yima is both in the Indian and in the Iranian tradition the first man. The *Yasht* 13.130, the only one to mention this circumstance, describes him besides as the first

10. "devebhyah kam avṛṇīta mṛtyum prajāyai kam amṛtaṁ nāvṛṇīta/
bṛhaspatiṁ yajñam akṛtvata ṛṣim priyaṁ yamas tanvaṁ prāṇirecit."

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king. His name means both in Sanskrit and in Persian the twin, in all probability the divine twin, for the Indo-Iranian myth that makes of him the human twin of his sister and consort Yami/Yimeh does not seem to be original in any respect.¹¹ As sun-man (he indeed is so described in many passages) Yima is the twin of the sun-god. The myth of the two suns is mentioned in several accounts. Thus in a late New Persian poem, which refers to Yima's refusal to accept the religion that Ohrmazd himself proposes to him, it is said that at the time of their separation the earth witnessed a great miracle, for, as the account narrates, "on that day when the people looked up to the heaven...they saw two suns in the heavens, each rearing its head, as they hastened on. One reared its head in heaven, and the other came down to earth. When Jamshīd (=Yima) alighted on the earth, the people marvelled at him. They began to praise God (saying): "We rejoice at thy creation, O Thou who showest the way. Thou hast made this thy servant so fair of face that in brilliance he is like upto Mithra."¹² Another late passage tells us in the same vein that Yima, after having conquered for the world the *Good Fortune* (baraka), which the Devil had made temporarily captive in his domain in the North, "rose like the sun and light shone forth in him, for he was luminous like light itself : and the people marvelled at the rising of two suns, and all the wood that had been dry became green."¹³

These and other texts, among which are to be reckoned several of the Yashts, clearly prove that the wrath of the Prophet was not sufficient to destroy the ancient glory of Yima, even after having substituted his contentious figure by that of Gayōmart, in order to free his followers from the shame of having for father a follower of the cult of the daevas, who, requested by Ohrmazd, roundly refuses to follow the Good Religion :

As Zaehner says : the Zoroastrians, rather than accept Yima as the first man, invented a first man of their own,

11. Cf. R.C. Zaehner, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

12. Cf. F. Spiegel, *Die traditionelle Literatur der Parsen*, p. 328.

13. Cf. Al-Birūnī, *Chronologie orientalischer Völker*, ed. C.E. Sachau, p. 217.

namely, Gayōmart (literally meaning *mortal life*), who inherited in his turn certain of Yima's characteristics including his solar nature. Thus according to the texts at his death two-thirds of his seed were taken to the sun to be purified there and he himself is described as *shining like the sun*.¹⁴

According to a very ancient Persian tradition Yima's kingdom was a replica of Mithra's dwelling above high Haraiti, *where there is neither night nor darkness, neither cold wind nor hot, nor diseasing in death abounding*.¹⁵ But whereas Mithra's dwelling was a heavenly paradise, that of Yima was an earthly one : *He made the earth in fairness like unto the House of Song*.¹⁶

As Zaehner says, "for the ancient Iranians Yima was, like the Yama of the Indian tradition, a god among men, for on earth he is seen to correspond to the Wise Lord in heaven in much the same way as Mithra does."¹⁷

During his golden age Yima extended threefold the earth in order to make room for all *cattle, great and small, men and dogs, birds, and red burning fires*.¹⁸ According to the Yashts however his golden kingdom lasted only so long as he had not *lied, until he admitted a lying, untrue word into his mind*¹⁹, whereafter his *kingly glory* (Kavaem khwarenō) departed from him and was received by Mithra for safe-keeping²⁰.

According to Zoroaster the sin of Yima consisted in the fact of having sacrificed an ox and having distributed portions of its flesh among the assistants :

Among those sinners, he says, was Yima, the son of Vivahvant, for so have we heard, who to please our men, gave them portions of the flesh of the ox to eat.²¹

This is a text of difficult understanding for it can be taken in various senses. As a matter of fact it has been taken

14. Cf. *Greater Bundahishn* 100.14.

15. *Yasht* 10.60.

16. *Denakart*, ed. Madan, 593.21-22.

17. R.C. Zaehner, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

18. *Videvdāt* 2.8.

19. *Yasht* 19.33.

20. *Yasht* 19.33.

21. *Yasna* 32.8.

as a diatribe against animal sacrifice on account of its cruelty which offends humanitarian feelings, and also as an attack against a traditional cult which Yima would have instituted in which an ox was slaughtered in honour of the daevas. To us it is in the first instance a metaphorical description.

Although these various alternatives are not mutually exclusive, the first can hardly be maintained, for the Avestan text of the ritual of the yasna clearly shows that it originally contained both the immolation of the Haoma-plant and the bloody sacrifice of an ox. "This emerges clearly enough from the offering of the "gāush hudāo," *the beneficent ox* and the "gām jivyām," *the living cow* (still translated as *meat* in the Pahlavi translation)" says Zaehner²². Besides, the actual slaughter of a bull is still mentioned in the Pahlavi translation of the *Yasna*. That Zoroastrianism had no theological objections against the ox sacrifice is obvious from the words of *Yasna* 29.6-7, according to which, *the Wise Lord in agreement with Righteousness (asha) created for the ox the sacred formula of the oblation of fat*²³. This is as much as to say that in the original dispensation the bovine species was created to serve as a sacrificial oblation. And this by a decree of Ahura Mazdāh in accordance with "asha", with the *Truth*, with *Righteousness*. Another proof that Zoroastrianism had no fundamental objection against the ritual immolation of an ox is that the sacrifice of the resurrection of the dead at the end of time is described as the sacrifice of an ox from whose fat the white Haoma will be prepared, after drinking which *all men will become immortal for ever and ever*²⁴.

It is the ill-treatment of the cattle against which Zoroaster fulminates and not its actual sacrificial immolation, unless, of course, the ceremony was celebrated in honour of the daevas, as in the case of Yima, for then it could only deserve reproach from the Prophet, not only because of its sinful dedication to the demons, which made of it a *bad* or incorrect sacrifice and a *heavy* one, but also because its priests were

22. R.C. Zaehner, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

23. Cf *Yasna* 29.6-7.

24. *Great Bundahishn*, p. 226 : translation in R.C. Zaehner's *The Teachings of the Magi*, pp. 148-149.

not followers of the Truth, had no experience and were not *incarnate words* and, apart from all that, they brought the wrong sort of fuel to the sacred fire, performed the wrong kind of ritual prostrations, etc.,²⁵ All this amounts to saying that in spite of external similarities a deep theological difference existed between the cult of the *daevas* and that of *Ahura Mazda*. The difference consisted in the fact, already mentioned, that whereas the heterodox liturgy, like the Vedic sacrifice and the Mithraic Mysteries, had at the same time a creative and a redemptive sense (cf. ch. I end), the orthodox sacrifice, like the Christian mass, had primarily in view the redemption of the world. Apart from that the very conception of redemption differed in both cases, for whereas the sacrifice of *Yima* gave only access to the immortality of the body, the orthodox sacrifice promised not only the immortality of the body but also that of the soul²⁶.

But all this does not exhaust the meaning of the present passage, which Zaehner understands in a literal sense, whereas we prefer to give to it a metaphorical meaning. For, if *Yima*'s sin merely consisted in the fact of sacrificing an ox and distributing its flesh among the participants, it is difficult to see the specificity of his fault, since, as we have said, the same orthodox *yasna* originally contained the ritual immolation of an ox and the consumption of the victim among the participants. The acrimony of the words of the Prophet cannot possibly be based on a small ritual fault like the one that Zaehner reads in the passage, namely, that *Yima* distributed directly the flesh of the victim among the lay people, instead of giving it first to the priests, as the Zoroastrian ritual probably demanded.²⁷ No, the wrath of the Prophet has to be based on a fault of a much more serious nature. To us his condemnation has not any real bull-sacrifice in view, but only the self-immolation of *Yima* which on account of its intimate association to the *daeva*-cult was so irritating in his eyes that he did not even want to

25. Cf. *Yasht* 14.55-56. Cf. also R.C. Zaehner, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

26. The *Haoma*-rite of the Prophet, according to the Pahlavi gloss to *Yasna* 9.1. makes both soul and body immortal in righteousness", whereas, according to the same passage, "they who devoured *Yima*'s meat became immortal in body (only)."

27. Cf. R.C. Zaehner, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

mention it straight away, but referred to it in a veiled manner, under the image of the ox-sacrifice. In any case Zoroaster's condemnation of Yima cannot possibly have completely overlooked the most important point regarding Yima's myth, namely, that of his self-immolation.

Whereas the words of the Prophet literally understood are hardly less than meaningless, metaphorically understood they acquire a great force. The same thing happens with some other sentences which Zoroaster attributes either to the priesthood of the old cult (Karapans and Usigs) or to the followers of the Lie in general. As for Yima Zoroaster accuses him of destroying the life of the ox *with shouts of joy* and of stating that the ox and the sun are *the worst thing the eyes can behold*²⁸. As for the priests of the old cult and the followers the Lie they are respectively incriminated by him for handing over the ox to *fury or violence* (aēshma) and for not allowing the ox and the cow to prosper²⁹. Now, what is one to understand by all these accusations? Have they to be taken as indicating that the daeva-cult was particularly wild and furious and was besides inspired by a kind of hatred against the bovine species, which demanded its immolation in such quantities as to endanger the very propagation of the species? If this was so, as Zachner seems partly inclined to believe³⁰, then the daeva-cult, besides being in itself a rather peculiar religious phenomenon, must have been much more different from the Mithraic Mysteries and the Vedic cult than what is generally believed, for neither of them presents the mentioned characteristics, at least in historic times. Apart from that what could be the meaning of the phrase attributed by Zoroaster to Yima according to which the sun is one of the two worst things that the eye can see? If we take the words in their literal sense, we will have to credit Yima with a sort of hate for the sun, which, given his solar nature and his solar ascendancy, is wholly incomprehensible. No, these words cannot have a literal meaning and yet they are too strong to have the banal sense

28. *Yasna* 32.10 and 12.

29. *Yasna* 44.20, 46.4.

30. Cf. R.C. Zachner, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85.

which Zaehner attributes to them, namely, that the daeva-worshippers, like the initiates in the Mithraic Mysteries, performed their rituals in a cave or at night³¹. A circumstance like that, undoubtedly inspired in reasons of symbolism, could not possibly arouse such indignation in Zarathushtra. To us not only this sentence but all the rest have not a literal but a metaphorical sense. What they really condemn is not an ordinary ox-sacrifice, but the creative immolation of the first God and the first Man, symbolized respectively by the sun and the ox, which in the eyes of the Madayasnians had to appear for obvious reasons as a *heavy* sacrifice. That is why they condemn it and accuse the Daeva-yasnians, with Yima at their head, of not seeing with good eyes the integrity of the sun and the ox, of assisting at the sacrifice of the life of the ox *with shouts of joy* and of not hesitating to hand over the ox to what in their eyes could be well considered as the *fury* of destruction (aeshma). The idea of creative immolation was too closely related to the cult of the daevas for Zoroaster to have failed to see it with abomination, given his typical attitude in regard to anything connected with the daeva-worship.

That our interpretation is possible is further made clear by some complementary indications, given by the Pahlavi books in regard to Yima's lie, namely, that it consisted in despising the creator and in claiming for himself the title of creator³². The sense of these expressions can be clearly gathered from various passages. Thus the *Mithra Yasht* informs us that to despise the Creator means to think slightly of the Wise Lord, the Bounteous Immortals, Mithra, the Law and Rashnu, and to sacrifice to the daevas³³. All this is further clarified by the Pahlavi glosses to chapter 32 of the *Yasna*, where we read that the worshippers of the daevas taught that sovereignty does not come from the Wise Lord, but from Ahriman and also that they sacrificed to the daevas and considered themselves as the true dispensers of the divine word³⁴.

31. Cf. R.C. Zaehner, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-127.

32. Cf. *Dātastān i dēnik* 38.20; Pahlavi *Rivāyats* 31.a.10; *Dēnkart*, ed. Madan, 340.11.

33. *Yasht* 10.138-139.

34. Cf. R.C. Zaehner, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

That to despise the creator means to acknowledge as Creator Ahriman instead of Ohrmazd becomes crystal clear in the myth of Mashyē Mashyānē, the Iranian Adam and Eve, who like Gayōmart are substitute figures for Yima³⁵.

This myth tells us that after Gayōmārt's death his seed was carried to the sun, where it was purified; whereafter a third of it returned to the earth, where it lay buried for forty years. After those forty years the first human couple, Mashyē and Mashyānē, emerged from the earth in the form of a rhu-barb plant. *It was as if their hands were clapped to their ears, and they were joined the one to the other, joined in limb and form. And over the twain hovered their "kwarr" (glor)*³⁶. From their plant form they grew into the human form and became the first male and the first female. Then Ohrmazd warned them saying: *Worship not the demons*. Whereafter they confessed that Ohrmazd was the creator of *water, the earth, plants, cattle, sun, moon, stars, and all fertile things*. But soon afterwards the Aggressor assailed their minds and corrupted them, and they cried out: *"The Destructive Spirit created water, the earth, plants and other things..."* For this lie both were damned, and their souls (shall remain) in hell till the Final Body³⁷.

From this passage and the glosses to the Yasna 32 it is abundantly clear that to despise the Creator means in the Zoroastrian context to worship Ahriman as Creator instead of Ohrmazd. Such was the first lie that Yima allowed to penetrate into his heart according to the Pahlavi books. The second consisted in proclaiming himself Creator, by which is meant, not that he identified himself with Ahriman whom he had despised, but that he claimed for himself the title of Creator, which both the ancient Iranians and the ancient Indians had rightly bestowed upon him on account of his creative self-immolation. From the Zoroastrian standpoint this was not only a sin but also a lie, for according to the Prophet the first man was just a creature of Ohrmazd and not the outcome of the creative immolation of a divine being. Yet

35. Cf. R.C. Zaehner, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

36. *Greater Bundahishn* 101.2-6:

37. *Ibid.*, 102.9-15

this lie was considered truth by so many contemporary people of the Prophet that he could not simply overlook it ; he had to say something about it and he indeed referred to it, as pointed out, under the image of the ox-sacrifice performed by Yima.

The sum total of these points tends to prove the perfectly Vedic, or, more accurately said, Indo-Iranian background of the oldest formulation of the doctrine of the original sin in Zoroastrianism. It also shows the theological fecundity and from another point of view originality of the Vedic conception of the sacrifice, for it is this conception that constitutes the point of departure of many theological formulations of Zoroastrianism.

When the exclusively Indo-Iranian roots of the oldest Zoroastrian version of the Fall of Man were lost sight of, a new version of the myth was created in which death is no more a self-sacrifice, but a defeat, a defeat inflicted by the Devil, as a matter of fact by the Demon of Concupiscence. For we read in the Pahlavi books that *When the Destructive Spirit saw that he himself and the demons were powerless on account of the Righteous Man, he swooned away. For three thousand years he lay in a swoon...till the accursed Whore came after the three thousand years had run their course, and she cried out (saying) : "Arise, O our father, for in the battle (to come) I shall let loose so much affliction on the Righteous Man and the toiling Bull that, because of my deeds, they will not be fit to live...And she related her evil deeds so minutely that the Destructive Spirit was comforted...And the Destructive Spirit cried out to the demon Whore : "Whatsoever is Thy desire, that do thou ask, that I may give it thee"...And the demon Whore cried out to the Destructive Spirit (saying) : "Give me desire for man that I may seat him in the house as my Lord."...*³⁸

Thus started the fall of man according to this later version of the myth, which is probably connected with various similar versions found in Manicheism, Gnosticism and the Judaeo-Christian tradition, for such is the case in respect of

38. *Greater Bundahishn* 39. 11ff; see R.C. Zaehner, *Zurvan, A Zoroastrian Dilemma*, pp. 355-60.

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the majority of religio-cultural conceptions in this cradle of cultures and religions which is the Middle East³⁹.

As for the older version of the myth—that of Yima's sin—we do not know its relationship to the Biblical myth of Adam's fall. But of one thing we can be fairly sure, namely, that it is basically independent of the latter, for its Indo-Iranian background is too obvious to postulate a Semitic influence. Theoretically speaking it is more possible that the Biblical myth may depend on the Iranian one, and this for several reasons. First of all, because the Biblical myth got its final formulation at an epoch in which there had already been deep contacts between the Judaic tradition and the Persian, as well as with the Babylonian sources in general, as the Priestly narrative of the *Genesis* clearly shows⁴⁰. In the second place because some of the obscure points contained in the Biblical myth seem to acquire a sudden clarity when set in relation with the Zoroastrian myth of Yima, supposing of course that the whole Biblical narrative does not simply revolve around the infraction of "a tabu with which a tree with magical properties had been surrounded," as E.O. James believes⁴¹. The obscure points to which we are referring are on one side the character of "sin of nature" that the fault of Adam is supposed to have had and on the other hand its intimate connection with an express desire of imitating God. These are points which almost two thousand years of theological speculation have not been able to clarify, whereas they become fairly transparent if we admit a possible dependance of the Biblical account of the Fall of Man on the Zoroastrian one. Since, as

39. After the Exile many Jews remained in Ecbatana (Media) and in Babylonia. For a long time the Hebrew and Zoroastrian literature went on exchanging literary materials. On the other side the model of the system of the Gnostics seems to have been at least in part certain Iranian myths. The same can be said of the Manichean doctrines. See as references J. Bide, *Ecoles Chaldéennes*; Widengren, "Stand und Aufgaben der iranischen Religionsgeschichte", *Numen*, 1955; J. Doresse *The Secret books of the Egyptian Gnostics*.

40. Cf. for instance, Sources Orientales, *La Naissance du Monde*, "La Naissance du Monde selon Israël."

41. E.O. James, *Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East*, p. 106.

Zachner says, for Zoroaster Yima "was a sinner who forfeited his own immortality and with it the immortality of all his seed."⁴² and apart from that he claimed to be a co-creator, not of Ohrmazed, as Zachner affirms⁴³, but of Ahriman, the foremost of the daevas, whom like the rest of the daevayasnians he considered as the supreme Creator, in agreement, with the purest Vedic tradition.

I find difficult to believe that the idea of original sin being such a theologically specific doctrine, might have arisen in a completely independent way in two religious traditions, in other respects geographically and doctrinally so closely connected, as the Judaic and the Zoroastrian, specially bearing in mind (a) that the whole of the Eden episode of the Yahwiste is suggestive of Mesopotamian influences and affinities in contrast to the essentially Palestinian setting of the opening verses,⁴⁴ (b) that there is no comparable Babylonian or Sumerian version of either Eden or the Fall of Man⁴⁵ and (c) that the idea of an earthly Paradise is strictly of Iranian origin (the very word for Paradise in Greek and Hebrew being of Persian origin) and that there is a Zoroastrian myth of the Fall of Man, of strictly Indo-Iranian origin, which sheds abundant light on some obscure points concerning the parallel Biblical myth.

Thus it is not impossible that Yima's story might have intervened in some degree in the formulation of the story of Adam, something not too surprising if one bears in mind the considerable influence that Zoroastrianism has exercised on the whole of the Judaic tradition⁴⁶.

The mass of legends that has woven itself around the striking figure of Yima, at once romantic and tragic, serves to illustrate in a concrete way not only the tension between Mazdayasnians and Daevayasnians within the fold of the Iranian tradition, but also the opposition between the Indian

42. R.C. Zachner, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

43. R.C. Zachner, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

44. E.O. James, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

45. E.O. James, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

46. R.C. Zachner, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

and the Persian traditions in general, for the Zoroastrian myth of Yima is exactly the reverse of the Vedic myth of Yama. Thus, whereas the self-immolation of Yama in the Vedic context is no more than the continuation of the self-sacrifice of Puruṣa and the perfect completion of the cosmic adventure which is the descent of consciousness into matter, the sacrifice of Yima in the Zoroastrian context is purely and simply the original sin, which demands for its atonement the descent of a Saviour (saoshyans) who will have to perform a counteracting sacrifice in order to set things aright at the end of time. In the Vedic perspective, however, Yama not being a sinner is not only able to go back unaided to his former state, but he becomes the guide *par excellence* of all mortals to the celestial abodes, for as *R̥g Veda* 10.14.2 says : *He has first found out the way for us and this pasture is not to be taken away*⁴⁷.

This is not the only point in which the Indian and the Persian traditions differ. As a matter of fact it can be proved that Zoroastrianism represents almost point by point the reverse of the Indian tradition, something which explains to some extent the difficulties encountered by the "ecumenical" dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity, bearing in mind that the Judaeo-Christian tradition has a doctrinal scheme very similar to that of Zoroastrianism.

The Vedic doctrine of the sacrifice as supreme principle, which constitutes one of the most daring conceptions of the Vedic theology, is maintained not only in the Brāhmaṇas, but also, in a modified way, in the Upaniṣads. To begin with the ātman/brahman of the Upaniṣads, called also the Great Person or Puruṣa, is described to us over and over again in the same terms as the sacrifice is described in the literature of the Brāhmaṇas and with less detail in that of the Vedas, namely, as the cause of the separation and reunion of all things, as the creative and devouring principle of the Universe, and, as the food of the world on one side and that which feeds on it on the other. Here are some of the relevant passages in the Upaniṣadic literature :—

Aitareya Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.2.3.7 *What we call the*

47. "Yamo no gātum p rathamō viveda", "naiṣā gavyūtir apabbhartavā u."

great Person is the Year, which causes some beings to fall together and causes others to grow up. Its essence is yonder sun.

Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 4.11. If a man has discerned him, who, being only one, rules over every germ (cause), in whom all this comes asunder again, who is the Lord, the bestower of blessing, the adorable deva, then he passes for ever into that peace.

Vājasaneyi Saṁhitā Upaniṣad 16 O Pūṣan, the only seer..., spread thy rays and gather them. The light, which is thy fairest form, I see it. I am what he is (the person in the sun).

Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.2.5 Whatsoever he brought forth that he resolved to eat. Verily he devours everything. That is the liberty of Aditi.

Chāndogya Upaniṣad 4.3.7 He is the Self of the devas, the creator of all beings, with golden tusks, the eater, not without intelligence.

Taittirīya Upaniṣad 3.10.6 I am food, I am the eater of food! I am the first born of ṛta. Before the devas I was in the centre of all that is immortal...I overcome the whole world, I, endowed with golden light.

Kāṭha Upaniṣad 5.3 He it is who sends out the breath (prāṇa) and throws back the breath (apāna). All devas worship him, who sits in the centre.

Aitareya Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2.2.1.3. He as up-breathing is a swallower (gr̥tsa), as down-breathing he is delight (mada).

The Brahman or Ātman of the Upaniṣads is not merely described in the same terms as the sacrifice in the Brāhmaṇas and Vedas (cf specially the myths of Puruṣa and Prajāpati), but also it is positively identified with it in a series of passages. See, for instance.

Aitareya Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2.1.1.1. This is the path, this, the sacrifice and this, the Brahman. This is the truth.

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.1.10 The Puruṣa alone is all this, the sacrifice, the asceticism, the supreme and immortal Brahman.

Aitareya Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.2.3.12 The adhvar̥yus call the Self sacrificial fire, the Chandogas, Mahāvṛata. It is everywhere. Him alone they call Brahman.

Already the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (14.3.2.1) said: Now this, namely, the sacrifice, is the Self of all beings and of all gods.

These identifications are not the result of a kind of doctrinal compromise, as it is sometimes insinuated but a concrete expression of the deep affinity that exists between the Upaniṣadic concept of ātma/brahma and the Vedic concept of sacrifice, both of which are described, as we have just seen, in equivalent terms. Centuries will have to pass before a concept of divinity with more or less asuric traits should again emerge in the Indian tradition. The Brahman of the Upaniṣads is too close to the Vedic epoch to present the asuric connotations that the Īśvara of Rāmānuja or that of Madhva, so close to the Zoroastrian concept of divinity, have. The Upaniṣadic concept of ātman/brahma is not only homologous to the Vedic concept of ṛta/yajña, as we said in chapter II, but it represents its continuation, despite the change of language and formulation characterizing the Vedāntic literature. It is not without reason that Brahman is described in one passage of Scripture as *the one that sacrifices himself in all the beings and all the beings in himself*. Such a description completely situates Brahman in the purest Vedic tradition. The same has to be said regarding the equivalent description given in *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.10.6 of the supreme Puruṣa as the food of the world and the one who feeds on it.

Even supposing that the Vedānta would effectively reject the final soteriological value of the path of the works or sacrifices, which in our opinion it does not, by the mere fact of conceiving the Supreme Reality as something which sacrifices itself in all beings, which gives itself as food to the whole world, it would still represent the direct continuation of the Vedas, given the strict equivalence of their most fundamental conceptions.

Verily the Upaniṣadic concept of Brahman entirely rests on the Vedic concept of sacrifice or as the Gītā (3.15) puts it by way of a conclusion that oversteps the premises in a significant way :

Therefore the all-pervasive Brahman ever centres round the sacrifice : "tasmāt sarvagatam brahma nityam yajñe pratiṣṭhitam."

As for the change of terminology which is observable in

the Upaniṣads, it is in all certainty the result of a series of factors which are not easy to specify.

One of them seems to have been in the case of the substantive *ṛta* : the premature death of the word which, as Lüders says, is clearly indicated by the fact of having left no traces either in Pāli or in any other of the Prakrits. That in these circumstances the word *ṛta*, even after having been partially resurrected in a later period, had to make room to another word to designate its object—in the present case to the word Brahman, is something that cannot surprise anyone.⁴⁸

As for the general change of terminology, it is certainly related to the progressive substitution of mythical thought by philosophical thought which marks the beginnings of the Upaniṣadic period. As Śrī Aurobindo says, one of the main tendencies of the Vedāntic movement “was to disencumber itself progressively of the symbolic language, the evil of concrete myth and poetic figure, in which the mystics had shrouded their thought and to substitute a clearer statement and more philosophical language.”⁴⁹

Apart from that many other factors must have been at work, but not even all of them have sufficed to loosen the ties which bind together the Vedic and Vedāntic traditions and which the Upaniṣadic ṛṣis positively emphasize, identifying one by one the central conceptions of the Vedas with the ātma/brahma conception of the Vedānta. We have already seen the identity established by them between Brahman and the sacrifice.

Other identifications no less important than this are the ones they establish between Brahman and the *ṛta*, Brahman and the Waters, Brahman and the cosmic tree, which as we have said in chapter V, thoroughly expresses and illumines the most fundamental Vedic conceptions.

Let us go over some of these identifications repeating where necessary some of the texts previously quoted.

48. Cf. H. Lüders, *Varuṇa*, pp. 14, 406, 411, 413.

49. Śrī Aurobindo, *On the Veda*, p. 15.

Concerning the identification of Brahman with the *ṛta*, it is hardly possible to find a more eloquent passage than Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad 1.6. It says :

This only is the ṛta, this only is the truth, they say—, this only is the Supreme Brahman of the Kavis.

The stanza is already found in *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* 1.1.2, which can be taken as an index not only of its antiquity, but also of its doctrinal importance.

The same identification is found in the following passage :

He should say : "Bhur, bhuvaḥ, svar !" This is the Brahman, this is the Truth, this is the ṛta.

Coming to the identification of Brahman with the waters, *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* 1 tells us that the last revelation that anyone will hear, at the end of his spiritual ascension along the famous *path of the devas*, from the lips of the very Brahman, is no other than this :

Water indeed is this my world, the whole Brahma-world, and it is thine. Whatever victory, whatever might belong to Brahman, that victory and that might he obtains who knows this, yea who knows this.

The same mystery is revealed in *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.32 :

"Water indeed becomes that one seer, (water) without any duality : this is the Brahma-world, O king." Thus did Yājñavalkya teach him. This (water) is his highest goal (the highest goal of the seer), this is his highest success, this is his highest world, this is his highest bliss. All other creatures live on a small portion of that bliss.

Regarding the identification made by the Upaniṣads between the Brahman and the Cosmic Tree of the Vedas we like to repeat here a couple of passages that we have previously cited. The first is from *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.6.1 and the second from *Maitrayaṇa Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad* 6.4. They say :

There is that ancient tree, whose root grows upward and whose branches grow downward. That is the bright Brahman ; all the worlds are contained in it.

The threefold Brahman has his root above; his branches are space, air, fire, water, earth and the other elements. "The single Fig-tree" is this Brahman called and it is its radiance which became the sun. It is known as Om and it belongs to the Imperishable. Furthermore, it is the only basis for the knowledge of Brahman.

In view of all these identifications we would not hesitate to subscribe to the following words of Ananda Coomaraswamy :

"There is little or nothing in the metaphysics of the Upaniṣads that necessarily implies a *progress* with respect to the older Vedic books.

That the language of the Upaniṣads is less archaic than that of the three Vedas proves only a late publication of the traditional exegesis, but in no way proves, nor even suggests, to those who recognize the consistency of one tradition in the Vedas and Upaniṣads, that the essential doctrines of the latter had not *always* been taught to those possessed of the necessary qualifications. This would fully accord with the traditional interpretation of Upaniṣad as *secret doctrine* or *mystery*, "rahasya", without contradicting the traditional connotation *doctrine with respect to the Brahman.*"

"It may be pointed out (in concrete) that Vedic "ṛta" and "dharma"...are to be thought of as essential names equivalent to later Brahman and the *Imperishable Word* (akṣara), Om."⁵⁰

These lines of Coomaraswamy, which, without a previous preparation, could sound too self-confident or perhaps too dogmatic, appear, we hope, quite sound at the end of all these considerations on the Vedic sacrifice, which we would like to contribute to a new formulation of some of the basic questions concerning the Vedic theology.

50. Ananda Coomaraswamy, *A new approach to the Vedas*, pp. 26 and 52.

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